

THE CULTURAL SIDE OF RENO

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A COLLABORATION WITH THE
OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM BERNARD AND BARBRO OSHER

An Oral History Conducted by Allison Tracy
Edited by Allison Tracy, Alicia Barber, and Gillian Griffith

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about events, people, places, and activities that have been significant in the twentieth century history of Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

THE OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE

Sponsored by Extended Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) is a member-directed organization that brings diverse educational and social opportunities to active older adult learners dedicated to the growth and leadership of an organization directed by and for its members.

Offering short-term educational experiences for adults 50 and over, OLLI seeks to foster intellectual stimulation, new interests, and personal development through academic pursuits, and to provide a community in which to gather, get acquainted and socialize.

OLLI at the University of Nevada, Reno is one of 119 Osher institutes established since 2001 at such colleges and universities as the University of California Berkeley, UC Davis, UCLA, Brandeis, Duke, Northwestern, Rutgers, Tufts, and Arizona State University.

For more information on OLLI, call (775) 784-8053 or visit their website at www.lli.unr.edu.

THE BERNARD OSHER FOUNDATION

Based in San Francisco, the Bernard Osher Foundation has supported higher education and the arts since its founding in 1977 by community leader Bernard Osher. It awards annual operating grants to strengthen lifelong learning programs on college and university campuses across the country.

INTRODUCTION

This oral history project on “The Cultural Side of Reno” is the product of an innovative two-year collaboration between the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Nevada, Reno.

In October 2009, Reno’s Osher institute received word from Mary G.F. Bitterman, President of the Bernard Osher Foundation, that each member institute would be eligible to receive what was termed a “lagniappe” of \$25,000 from Bernard and Barbro Osher to be used “in a constructive manner to strengthen your programs during these difficult times.”

After lengthy deliberation and consultation with the UNOHP and other area organizations, the OLLI board recommended devoting the funds to an oral history project involving its members, on a topic to be determined. In the proposal submitted to the main OLLI office in San Francisco in March of 2010, the Reno board wrote, “The benefit of a project such as this is tremendous. Not only

will OLLI and its members have a document that reflects the diversity and history of OLLI members, the university will have a valuable resource to share for years to come. Family members of those OLLI individuals interviewed will be the recipient of their own interview transcripts, resulting in a lasting history.”

The application was approved in April 2010, and efforts began to determine a specific topic for the oral history project. In order to shepherd the project to completion, a project committee was formed, comprised of OLLI members Bette Jensen (who later moved to Texas), Jane Sunday, and Pat Zimmerman; UNOHP Director Alicia Barber; and UNOHP coordinator Allison Tracy. In a June 2010 newsletter, OLLI members were asked to suggest subjects that would be of interest to their community and that would render the most members eligible to participate. Eighty surveys were returned, with suggestions ranging from life in the 1960s to the history of area nonprofit organizations and parks.

One notable theme emerging from the surveys was an interest in projects that would gather information about Reno's longstanding and ever-growing artistic and cultural community. These ideas crystallized in the topic choice of "The Cultural Side of Reno" in September 2010. As the board explained to its members: "This project will explore the growth, changes, and current condition of Reno-area cultural activities and organizations, including the performing and fine arts, theater, dance, historic preservation, museums, and special events like Artown."

This subject had the dual advantage of both ensuring that many members of OLLI could participate, and exploring an aspect of life in Reno that has only rarely been researched and documented, and never via the methodology of oral history.

In September 2010, OLLI members were asked to fill out informational forms asking what kinds of artistic and cultural activities they had participated in while living in the Reno/Sparks area. The goal was to identify potential chroniclers who could together provide a wide cross-section of information about Reno's cultural world—either from the point of view of spectators or active participants.

From this initial response as well as from additional research, 30 members of OLLI ultimately were invited to participate formally in the project. Interviews were conducted by Allison Tracy from January through August 2011.

With chroniclers' memories reaching as far back as the 1930s, the subjects covered are extensive, touching on art, theater, music, dance, photography, festivals and special events, historic preservation, casino entertainment, film, media, the humanities, the literary world, and more. From the Young

Audiences program to the Ageless Repertory Theater, the Nevada Museum of Art to Artown, the Sierra Watercolor Society to the Reno Philharmonic, chroniclers share their experiences building and strengthening the cultural foundations of the Biggest Little City in the World.

Alicia Barber and Allison Tracy
UNOHP
May 2012

MAJOR TOPICS COVERED

Ageless Repertory Theater
Art Angels
Artist's Co-Op Gallery Reno
Artists' Lofts at the Riverside
Artown
Casino shows
Channel 5 KNPB
Community Concerts
Entertainment writing
Film in Reno
Fundraising and Development
Hello Hollywood, Hello!
Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS)
Historical Resources Commission
Johnny Russell Orchestra
Latimer Art Club
Lifescapes
Local arts community
Local theater community
Marketing and Publicity
Nevada Arts Council
Nevada Festival Ballet
Nevada Humanities

Nevada Museum of Art
Nevada Opera
Nevada Repertory Company
Nevada Shakespeare Company
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
Painting
Philanthropy
Photography
Pioneer Theater
Portrait Society of Reno
Reno Chamber Orchestra
Reno Community Symphony
Reno Little Theater
Reno Philharmonic
Reno Pops Orchestra
Reno Rodeo
Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce
Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors
Authority (RSCVA)
Ruth Ryan School of Dance
Scenic Nevada
Sheep Dip
Sierra Arts Foundation

Sierra Watercolor Society
Stagehand/technical work
University of Nevada Libraries
University of Nevada School of the Arts
Vintage Players
Washoe County Libraries
Washoe County Planning Commission
Washoe County School District
Young Audiences of Northern Nevada

JAMES BERNARDI

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

James Bernardi: I was born in Stockton, California in 1942. In 1957, my dad was transferred to Reno, so the whole family moved to Reno after having spent all our life with family, relatives, nearest and dearest friends, and junior high school chums. Being ripped from Stockton and brought into Reno—which, in my mind, was primitive in those days with only two TV stations—was pretty devastating at first.

What was Stockton like?

I'm not sure where I was. I'm probably more aware in retrospect than I was at the time, because I was a kid growing up there. I had cousins and we took bike rides. It was very safe to ride our bikes. I rode my bike downtown at the age of twelve and thirteen. You would not let a kid do that today. You would have qualms about that.

It was on a river, and my grandfather was a fishmonger, to use the old-fashioned term. He had a fish market right on the river. Those were kind of heavy experiences to be with them when they were getting up at two in the morning and getting ready to sell fish. On Friday mornings they had to be there at two to get ready. We lived with them during the war, so I was very close to them and very much a part of their lives.

Can you tell me about the schools that you went to?

I don't know if they were particularly remarkable. My only favorite story is that I did go to kindergarten for two years. I don't know if I was a failure at kindergarten or quite why that happened, but I felt that that was really a good thing, because, rather than being the youngest person in the class, I ended up being the oldest person. So I always felt a little bit more mature than a lot of the other kids as a result of that.

I think my schooling was pretty ordinary. I had some wonderful teachers that I still remember who certainly seemed to take me under their wing. They pushed me in the right direction for a lot of things that have paid off in the subsequent time.

I just went to elementary school and junior high school there, then I moved to Reno and started high school here. My first year of high school was at Reno High.

Do you remember any arts or music programs at any point in your schooling?

Yes, I certainly do. Again, I think it was because I was so miserable here and I was making life miserable for my parents, so my mother pushed me. She knew they were doing tryouts for the play at the high school. She said, "Why don't you try out?" I'd never done anything like that. I mean, I'd gone to plays and always liked that, but she was just trying to find something to get me out of the house and to get me to stop moping. It took; It worked.

I had some wonderful teachers who were not extraordinarily trained, but they were really wonderful people because they had to do everything. So, theater was just one of the things they did, along with coaching speech and teaching English. Theater was not their mainstream thing.

When I got to work with them, they realized I had an artistic bent, so they would turn the scenery over to me, because they didn't want to have to deal with it. Of course, I didn't have any training. I was just sort of inventing scenery as I went along. I didn't know that there were actually ways to do things. I just figured, "oh, this is what we're going to do." They were just glad to have someone take over and do that because they didn't have time to deal with it. They were

very supportive of that, which sort of got me started. It was all in high school with teachers Margo Espinoza and Hardy McNew. Hardy joined the faculty during my senior year of high school. He was very knowledgeable about theatre and has remained a friend and mentor since.

Had you been exposed to arts and culture through your family prior to that?

No. They weren't oriented that way. When we lived in Stockton, I had friends and, every once in a while, we would go to a play. We also went to movies all the time. I was addicted to movies then and I'm still addicted to movies. But, in terms of any real artistic exposure, there was always encouragement. I always did artsy stuff as a kid. I did ceramic models and Plaster of Paris models of things and painted them. I fooled around with oil painting on my own, but I really didn't have any classes that helped in that respect.

What plays did you do at Reno High School?

The very first play was *I Remember Mama*. I was sixteen at the time and I played the son. I was bigger than the guy who played Papa, but I was inexperienced. I played the Marlon Brando role, as you probably would have guessed. [laughs] He played it on Broadway and he was very young. I was totally miscast. I was very young and very green, but it was my first experience. I met friends in that production that I'm still friends with today. The lady I walked with this morning was in that production; she and I became girlfriend and boyfriend back then because of that experience. I met a lot of good people, and my mother was right to get me out of the house and get me doing something.

So, that was the first one. I did *The Importance of Being Earnest* and then I did—I just saw the film—*Stage Door*, in high school. The other one in high school was *Skin of Our Teeth*. Those were the plays I did in high school.

What were your first impressions of Reno when you arrived?

I told you two TV stations, and, of course, nowadays that seems incredible, with all that we have at our disposal. Even then, though, that was incredible to me, because I'd left a place where we had four stations and here Reno only had two.

Again, my mother pushed me and I went to see a play at Reno Little Theater in 1957. I didn't know who they were or anything else. I just saw this play was coming on so I went down and was really impressed. It was *Desk Set*, which had been a Katharine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy film, in Reno Little Theater.

I did not know who these people were or anything about it, but it was quite a credible production. Now, this is coming from a kid who didn't really know anything, so I don't know if I would have the same reaction now. Over the years I went to see a lot of productions there and I was quite impressed with the quality.

Also, the university would do productions in what was then the State Building, where the Pioneer [Center for the Performing Arts] is now. There used to be a building there called the State Building which was *the* community auditorium.

At the university I saw a production of *Kismet* that the university produced. It was a joint musical production. It might have been in 1958 or 1959.

I came up on campus and saw a production of *Glass Menagerie* in the old Education

Building, which has since been converted into office space. That was the campus theater back in the late 1950s. So, I did see that one production on campus then.

Reno has been unique, and still is, in the fact that it has been advertised "the Biggest Little City," and I think that's appropriate. I feel it is the Biggest Little City, and even though this was a very small town with not much going on, we had enormous talent come through in the showrooms.

As a kid, we would go to a dance or out on a Friday night. We could go to the Riverside afterwards and have a Monte Cristo sandwich and a Coke for \$12, and see Jimmy Durante for two people. I saw Carol Channing and Pearl Bailey. We saw all these major talents either at the Riverside or at the Mapes. It was a place where kids could go. You didn't have to be twenty-one to go into these showrooms.

They had two shows each night. The first one was a dinner show, which we couldn't afford. The later one, which was \$12, was a lot of money, but if you were out on a date and splurging a little bit, that was not much. They would sometimes have teen singers like Tommy Sands or even Frankie Avalon, and we would be able to go see those people.

That brought in a lot of musical talent. There was a chorus line and an orchestra in all the clubs. As a result, the orchestras consisted of musicians who had found frustration just playing that kind of music. They wanted to play other kinds, so they would do matinee performances of chamber music. So, there would never be evening performances, because the musicians all had to work at night, but on Sunday afternoons there would be Chamber Orchestra. They were high-quality musicians. You couldn't have gotten them any higher quality anywhere in America. These were people who made their living at it, but they just wanted to have an outlet where they

could do classical music other than the stuff that they would have to do for the showrooms.

Aside from the well of talented musicians, did the casino shows having any effect on Reno culturally?

Yes. [Raymond I.] “Pappy” Smith, who ran Harold’s Club, was quite a major donor to Manogue High School and felt that he probably had a right to use the gym whenever he wanted to. He would bring in major opera singers.

He would bring in Lily Pons in her rhinestones to appear at the Manogue gym. Jan Peerce would also come in to do the Manogue Auditorium—unbelievable. Then, Pappy Smith would develop relationships with these people, and Jan Peerce would appear in the seventh-floor showroom for a week run. I saw him. There he was, this major opera singer, working in one of the showrooms upstairs. It was a tiny little room with a \$5 minimum for a cocktail, and here’s Jan Peerce singing “Blue Bird of Happiness,” a couple of Beatles tunes, and “Vesti La Giubba.” It was an incredible mixture of things. Pappy Smith felt he kind of had an obligation to bring culture to Reno, and, by god, he did. It’s really weird.

The other cultural thing is, the day the Church Fine Arts Building opened, I was a student. That was the summer of 1960. My guess is the building was opened in August or July. Craig Sheppard was head of the department then and a well-known artist who knew everybody. He’d amassed the most incredible art show you can imagine in the halls. We had Braques, Picassos, and Renoirs with no security. You can’t even begin to think about this sort of thing. It was to celebrate the opening of the new building. Craig knew all these people who had these. There was a lot of money in Reno then, as there is now, and people had masterpieces

in their personal collections. Craig apparently knew them well enough that he could call up and say, “Can I borrow your Renoir for the week?” They would say, “Oh, sure. I’ll drop it off on the way to work tomorrow.” I’m making up the details, because it must have been more complicated than that. To walk in that building and see all this incredible art and no security was really pretty amazing.

What was the relationship between organizations like Reno Little Theater and other community-based cultural organizations and the casinos?

There’s always been a bit of tension there. I think the reason there has been tension is that the casinos really don’t want the people to leave the casinos. Anything that draws them outside has not been something that casinos have been very willing to support. I know Artown has had some challenges in that respect, too. Casinos love the fact all these people are coming to Reno, but they don’t like the idea of them spending three hours outside the casino on a gaming night. So, they really were not big help for the Little Theater or for the university.

They help in very strange ways, though. For instance, at that time I was a churchgoer, and Pappy Smith [phonetic] would give a Cadillac to be auctioned off on New Year’s for the benefit of the church. Casinos were very helpful in terms of supporting charities, but again, charity was not likely to take business away from the casinos. I also sort of felt it stopped them from doing any preaching against gaming, but I never heard anything said against gaming the entire time I was here.

You mentioned the Mapes and the Riverside and Pappy Smith and his involvement. Were those the big casinos at the time?

Those were the big casinos. Harrah's has evolved, but when I first got here, it was definitely the Riverside and the Mapes. They were upper scale, and back then Harolds was a lower scale. There were other casinos around then, of course, but those were the major ones. There was The Nugget in Sparks with John Ascuaga. It was actually Dick Graves' [Nugget] then, and later became John Ascuaga's Nugget. They weren't doing shows initially. It was a big thing when they added on the showroom, because it was a change from what happened before. Before, it was just a casino and restaurants—really great restaurants—but it was not a place where shows were done. We even had cabaret shows, but I was too young to go to the cabaret. I couldn't do that, but I could go to the main showrooms.

I was going to ask if cabaret shows had made their way to Reno yet.

They did, there were some—I wouldn't call them cabaret—I would call them bar shows to make a distinction. They would be pretty much just a stage behind the bar and the people would be gambling around them. They wouldn't be in a separate space and you wouldn't pay anything.

Ray Anthony and His Bookends, for instance, was one of the acts. He had had a big band, but he was down to a combo and a couple of attractive women. They would get up and perform just in the back behind the bar. There would be people having drinks. That's how Louie Prima and Keely Smith got their start; they were doing the bar stuff. There were a lot of people who came in and did the bars who would eventually move into the cabaret, which would be a whole different room, a whole different space, and a different animal than the bar shows.

Besides Reno Little Theater, UNR, which was active at the time, and casino shows, what else was available culturally at the time?

The museum was really much in its very early days. I mentioned the Chamber Orchestra evolving. That wasn't when I first started here, but it evolved over time. They would bring in shows every once in a while. When I was a senior in college, Hal Holbrook came through to do *Mark Twain Tonight* at the State Building. He was brought in at a great expense; it was incredibly expensive to be able to bring in a show of that caliber. As a student, I stage-managed for him and had to pick up his makeup kit. The university provided support, because it was one of the co-sponsors. That kind of thing was rare though.

Every once in a while there would be a traveling opera or traveling dance company, but those were not regular occurrences. I imagine those were part of a community concert series, but I don't know much about those. I didn't participate in those. I just know that they existed and I did go see some things.

What was the State Building facility used for?

Downstairs was the library and where you got your driver's license. Upstairs was the auditorium. The auditorium had: a balcony, a main floor, a stage, modest wings, a basement below the stage, and modest dressing rooms. That's where the university's *Wolves' Frolics* would always be produced at the State Building.

There would be occasional lectures in the upstairs part, but downstairs were public offices. That's where I went to get my driver's license, and there was drivers' training there as well. Part of it was the library before all that got started. It was multipurpose in every

single sense of the word. Functions that you couldn't even imagine occupying similar spaces today, did then.

You started at UNR in 1960. What was UNR like then, and how did you decide to study theater?

I started out here as a math major to be sensible, but that didn't take. Then I switched to English because I was trying to be practical again, and that didn't take either. I realized that theater was my passion.

I wanted to go elsewhere, but we were not people with money. I had looked into a couple of California schools and had been accepted, but there was just no way we could come up with that kind of money. So, I could live at home and go to school. I can't remember how much it was, but it was very reasonable even then. Back then, you could take as many classes as you wanted for a flat fee. In other words, it was not per credit. So that was a real attraction. You could take eighteen credits if you wanted to.

I started out taking the usual required courses, and Intro to Theater was one of my courses in there. They were having auditions for a fall play. I was a freshman and it was highly competitive, but I got cast. I have to tell you, I was not a very good actor then. I really know I was not a good actor. I was cast, I think, because I looked older. All these other freshmen were not getting cast, so I felt, "Well, look at me! Look at me!" But I really was not that good. I know—and I'm not trying to be modest or anything—I just know I was not very good. The poor director worked very hard to try to get out a performance. There were only six of us in the cast, but that was the first season of the theater.

The theater opened in 1960 with a production of *Ah, Wilderness!* The idea was

to do an all-American season. *Ah, Wilderness!* was Eugene O'Neill's comedy about American life. Back then, one director directed four main-stage productions and then there were two other main stage. So, there were six shows done that year. I couldn't believe it. Now it would be impossible to do that many.

At any rate, I was in the third show, *The Rivalry* by Norman Corwin, which was about the Lincoln-Douglas debates. It was, again, a very American play, but there were only six of us in the cast.

Then they did *Our Town*, which is an American classic. They also did *The Male Animal*, I believe, the [James] Thurber play. Then, they did a children's play. So they did six shows in one year, which was pretty amazing, and one director did four of those.

Who was in the department teaching?

Charles Metten, the head of the theater department, directed most of the shows. Dr. William C. Miller, who was an institution in the state, started the Theater Department back when it was English in the 1930s. He had been in the English Department in the 1930s and was responsible for maintaining it. Then, Dr. Metten was brought in to bring it into the modern time.

Dr. Miller was in his dotage. He was ready to move towards retirement, but he didn't retire until I came back. I ended up replacing him, actually, when I came back as a faculty member in 1972. He was around, but not active, although he was still teaching classes and was an institution. He taught lots of governors. This was a very small state and UNR was the major institution back then, so anybody who was a governor would have come through here. Bill Miller knew all the politicians; he was pretty influential in that respect.

Terry Elmore was the technical director at the time. It was a combined Speech-Theater Department, and Dr. Robert Griffin was the head of the speech part of it. He was head of the whole department. The theater has always been kind of part of the department, but autonomous at the same time.

What influence did the various professors have on the department? How did they shape theater?

I think that they each brought different qualities. Dr. Metten was very serious and very professional. Dr. Miller was more natural and less professional. Sometimes he would try to break up actors on stage, which was not very professional, but he felt it was important to have a good time. I'm not sure I would still agree with him, but that was his philosophy. He would do things that would sometimes upset people to try to break them up as part of his productions. He became an institution, but he had his detractors as well. He was in a different place than Dr. Metten, who was much more professionally-oriented.

What was the curriculum like in the classes you took?

Because we were in speech-theater—which wasn't speech-theater, but rather speech-theater, audiology, and radio-television—there were four components. It was this stupid thing where we had to take courses in all the components in some way or another to justify being a combined department. It was very crazy, but we all did it. They did have courses designed for people who were not capable of doing those things.

Of course they also had the standard stuff, which is still pretty much there—Introduction to Theater, basic acting courses, basic tech

classes, and Theater History. Then, they branched off from those courses into people with technical specialties or people with acting specialties. So the curriculum was like then and that's what it's like now, though the specialties have become much more refined.

Of those specialties, in which direction did you go?

I went with tech. I developed a relationship with Bob Ware who became the technical director. Everything was jerry-rigged. He was a graduate student in the English Department. He was hired as a graduate student in the English Department to get his master's degree in English. In exchange for that, he received some money and he came over and designed the sets. He was a wonderful set designer and a really knowledgeable theater person. He and I became very close and I became his protégé. He gave me important things to do on the set designs, but I still acted, because it was a small program.

Again, because I always had maturity on my side, I ended up playing a lot of fathers. I played a bear in one play because I was big. They needed somebody. It was a real bear—I mean not a cartoon bear. It was a bear costume and I roasted and, just about died. So, I did act, but my bent was certainly towards the technical stuff and scene design.

What was the department's approach to theater? Were they more traditional or more avant-garde?

It was very, very traditional. There wasn't really much experimentation in terms of what the shows were. They would do modern shows; I don't mean to say they were doing 1930 hits or anything like that. They were doing current plays as well as classics. They

were competent productions, but there was nothing that would be cutting-edge or that would make people say, “Oh, this is the wave of the future.” There wasn’t that much experimentation. We were doing a lot of traditional stuff, but sometimes we’d do untraditional stuff. They had never been done here before, so people were surprised when they came and saw it. One of the evenings was advertised as “Two hits from the Middle Ages.” We did two medieval plays. That had not been done here before and, back then, was considered to be pretty forward-thinking.

How many other students were in the department?

I bet not very many, but I wouldn’t be able to guess. The university wasn’t very big—seven or eight thousand then, maybe. It’s hard to imagine, but it wasn’t very big. My guess is there might have been twenty of us, but there were always peripheral people who were auditioning for plays or taking classes and they would come aboard. We always had someone from the English Department who loved what we were doing and wanted to try out. We would have faculty members in the plays.

So the actors were open beyond the Theater Department?

Yes, absolutely. Very much so.

How did the instruction that you received at UNR influence what you studied later with theater?

Well, let’s not say instruction. Let’s say personalities. I never had a class from Bob Ware, but he certainly influenced me in an enormous way. I took courses from Dr.

Miller. I did not admire him as a teacher, but he was a very good friend and mentor of mine. He was very instrumental in getting me into graduate school. I also felt like there were five of us in the theater history class. My class now has thirty-five in it, so it just tells you the difference. I felt that his class was just kind of joking around. I didn’t feel like there was any real rigorous attempt to teach us very much. Nonetheless, I fell in love with theater history somewhere along the way—either there or in graduate school—and still love it today. I didn’t feel that he was instrumental in presenting that, though.

I did feel like Dr. Metten, who had this real quality attitude towards theater, was very helpful in helping me develop some philosophies about theater. I can’t remember anything specially about his quality of instruction, but I felt that the attitude that he brought to the productions and discussions was very instrumental in shaping my involvement in theater.

I wish I could say I had some more about the classes, but I really can’t. I think it’s the personalities that I have the strongest memory of.

Generally, how do you feel you were treated as a student in the program?

I was treated with a great deal of respect, mainly because they knew I was positive about doing the work. I liked the work and I was committed to it. They didn’t always have that; we still don’t have that. You don’t always have a kid who’s going to be willing to stay here until two in the morning painting sets or sweeping up, and we would have all-nighters. I wouldn’t even think of doing it now, but back then we would be up all night working on a set or rehearsing until two or three in the morning, and I wouldn’t think a

thing about it. They were very glad to have a kid who would say, "I'm with you no matter what," and not even question it. It wasn't just me, either. I don't think I was singled out. There were a lot of us who felt very welcomed and nurtured.

Do you remember other students in the program with you at the time?

I do. Two of them have died since then, but they were very talented people and both of them went on to be graduate students. Don Hockstaff ended up following me to Oregon and was a graduate student there. Then Richard Pullman ended up being a teacher at Sparks High School. So they followed through in theater; they did do that. There were other people who have done things in theater too.

Are there any particularly memorable experiences you have from studying theater or being involved in the department?

So much of it was so positive. I remember specific shows just because I was young and green and they were fresh experiences. When we did *Every Man* I remember all the guys in the cast had to wear tights for the first time and it was traumatic for us, just traumatic. They could hardly get us out of the dressing rooms. I don't think guys nowadays would have a problem at all. What's the big deal? Back then, all our lumps and fat and everything else was not being very well protected and we were all really very self-conscious. I remember that which certainly hasn't anything to do with my training, but that is a personal remembrance I have.

One of my dear friends still, Dale Gordon, was in those productions, but he went a different direction. He ended up working in the showroom at Harrah's. He ended up being

a technician, but he found a way of translating what he did in theater here to make a life for himself.

While you were a student, what were some of your favorite productions to work on?

I remember *Rashomon*, because I worked on the design side of that and it was really great fun. I did papier-mâché temple heads, heads of gods, and stuff like that from the Japanese temples. That was very exciting for me because I love doing that kind of thing.

The design work was when I first became aware of the potential of design. Bob knew how to use light to change the color of the costumes. They would be gray and dull in one scene and then bright and colorful in the next. All that sort of just opened doors to me.

Then, in my senior year, they did two Renaissance plays back-to-back. They did *Volpone* and *Merchant of Venice*, and they did a unit set, which I thought was pretty remarkable. I acted in both of them. Those are memorable experiences.

I know that you eventually came back to the UNR Theater Department. Can you fill in that time?

With Dr. Miller's aid, I ended up getting accepted at the University of Oregon. I didn't get an assistantship initially because, typical of places like that, they give them to people they already know. I was only there a month, though, and they said, "Okay, this kid can deliver." So, I had an assistantship real quick, though I did not go in the door with one. I got cast right away in plays because I had maturity. I didn't expect to, though. By that time I had figured out how to act. I was not very good in college, but in graduate school I would say I moved up a notch.

I had a wonderful experience at Oregon. I was there for two years. I got my master of arts there and appeared in some shows. I worked in the scene shop the whole time I was there, building, painting, and designing sets. I really learned an awful lot of technical skills there.

I went on an USO tour out there. The director needed somebody who could do tech and act, and there I was. It was very controversial that he selected a graduate student when they felt I should be on the payroll and working. I got paid the whole time I was going and I was very pleased. I was very lucky to get that.

At the end of my two years there, they had a drama convention, and my mentor at that school said, "They need somebody in Billings, Montana, to go and do sets and I told them you're the guy."

So I met the guy and he says, "You're hired."

So, after two years at the University of Oregon at Eugene, I went up to Billings, Montana. They had a brand-new theater, which had not been used at all. I came in as a technical director designer, teaching speech, public speaking and theater. That's what we had to do. You just didn't get to teach your subject. I never had a course beyond my beginning speech course when I was a student, but I ended up teaching public speaking for a number of courses there. When I came back here, I taught public speaking again—something which we couldn't do nowadays. I was up there for five years.

After a couple of years I thought maybe it would be better to go back and get my PhD. So, I went to the University of Denver on an assistantship, again in the shop. I hated the program. I felt that they had no understanding of reality. I mean, I had been teaching for three years, for god's sake. I had an idea of the realities of what we were doing.

We were asked to do research on stuff that had no relevance to whatever it was that we were doing.

My graduate advisor was very hostile when I would be in a play or working on a play. "No, you should be in the library. You should be doing research." I didn't share that particular bent. That was not who I was.

I left after the first year and went back to Billings, Montana. I was there two years when one of my colleagues there got a job offer here at UNR to be chairman of the department. He called me and said, "You want a job?" I didn't even apply.

I said, "Well, yeah, I guess."

He said, "Well, if you want to come down, you'll have to work half-time for one year. You'll have to resign at the end of that year, and then we'll give you a full-time job the following year."

I did not have a PhD; I just had a master's. I had to teach public speaking, which was very controversial because that was not my subject. I came down here for half-time for one year. It just about killed us off financially, but then Dr. Miller retired and I took over his full-time position and the rest is history.

What changes did you see in Reno from when you left to when you came back?

I can give you one real concrete change. The State Building was gone. The Pioneer Theater was here. That, to me, was a symbol. The State Building was this old creaky 1920s building. It was probably forty or fifty years old and quite antiquated and ill-equipped. The Pioneer, even with its flaws, represented a whole different attitude about what was happening in Reno.

In the interim, Ted Puffer had come in and brought opera to Reno. I saw some of his productions when I would come to visit,

when they were being done at the Reno Little Theater. He was not doing operas at the Pioneer; he was doing them at the Reno Little Theater at first. It was really a wonderful production of *Madame Butterfly* at the Reno Little Theater. I thought, "Wow. This is pretty impressive."

Indeed, the musical thing had picked up. I was gone seven years, to put it in perspective, and in that interim, the Sunday concerts I had talked about before had become absolutely happening. They were kind of incidental before, and now there was actual Reno Chamber Orchestra at the church on the river. I forget what it is now—where the Lear Theater is trying to go in. They would do actual concerts there. There was much more organization behind it. Maggie Banks was doing ballet.

All of that had developed in those seven years. Reno was no longer the primitive place that it once had been. It developed into something with a lot more cultural awareness. People were savvy. It was not just the awareness, but there were also people who knew what they were doing. Maggie had done *West Side Story* in Hollywood, for goodness sakes.

Ted Puffer is one of the great opera coaches. People would fly in just to work with Ted for a weekend on a role.

These were people who had credibility outside the area, but decided, "This is where I want to live and where I want to try to make a change." That was very impressive.

Do you have a sense of what happened in that seven years that allowed for such growth?

I really don't know. I came in and I was kind of surprised, but I just sort of took it for granted. Maybe this was just the way communities evolve. It was a magical development in that seven years.

Another thing—this sounds silly—the freeway had come in. It was in for the 1960 Olympics. They started building the freeway which brought a lot more people and a lot more possibility of tour shows that had not been here before coming through. That possibility, which had not been there before, opened up. If you were doing the old Highway 40 or the old Highway 50, it was five hours to get here between Anywhere back then. You had to have water to put in your radiator going over the summit. It was just like night and day in terms of the communication and the transportation possible. A lot more people were coming to Reno.

I think the gaming thing had really taken off there. They decided this could be big business, you know. It wasn't just sort of laid-back; it was big business. Maybe that had something to do with the growth of Vegas, too. Maybe we were picking up on what was happening in Vegas. When I came back, the university at Vegas had become a—I don't want to say competitor—but had become a reality, whereas before it was just sort of like a community college, a spur. We *were* the university of the state. That was not longer the case when I came back, though. We were the secondary institution already.

You said the casinos were more serious about it. How did that translate into what the shows were like?

They started out doing revue shows. Before I left, there was a hotel next to Harrah's. In fact, it's where Harrah's showroom is now. It was called the Golden. They did their first big revue show. By revue show, I mean it was like *Hello, Hollywood, Hello*, but with a piano that came out of the floor and doves that flew over the audience. Really, that's what it was. That was the first time that had happened, and

that became much more the direction of the shows.

Even when I was here in high school, there would be two chorus numbers every floor show, and the chorus girls lived in Reno. In fact, I dated a girl whose mother made the costumes for the chorus girls. They had to have new costumes every two weeks. There would be an on-stage orchestra which was the big expense. By going to a revue show, they didn't have that kind of expense.

When I came back, the choruses had disappeared and they were just doing headliners, because it was expensive to do the chorus girls. We're talking six or eight chorus girls. We're not talking the Rockettes, but we had six or eight women who were making a living and had families. I went to school with kids whose mothers were chorus girls. So there was that kind of thing going on.

When we came back, it became much more headliners and the headliner was the show. When we came back, the Nugget was in operation and Tina and Bertha, the elephants, were very much a part of it. Every entertainer joked about how you haven't worked until you've worked with Bertha. They would joke about it on TV because it became such a big thing.

By that time, John Ascuaga had taken over and there was a showroom there that was actually doing more, because the Riverside and the Mapes were fading into nothing. They were old buildings and they just didn't have quite the same draw that they once had. The Nugget and Harrah's became much more the places by then.

There's no doubt in my mind, though, they started marketing the bus tours that would [come up to Nevada from California]. All of that had evolved. It hadn't even existed in the early 1960s, but by the 1970s it was full force.

Was there still that same tension between the community-based organizations and the casinos?

I think there was. For instance, we had this wild idea when we first started the second year of the Nevada Repertory. Bob Dillard says, "What I think we really ought to do is do shows in the casinos." There were people doing dinner theater all over America, so we could do dinner theater at the casinos.

We put a couple of plays together. We did *No, No, Nanette*, which is a big musical, and we did *Come Blow Your Horn*, which was your standard box-set comedy. That would have been great for casinos. We brought stuff to the casinos and tried to sell it. They didn't want any shows like that. The shows were too long. They didn't want people to be seated in the showroom for more than an hour and fifteen minutes. So they said, "Thank you very much, but we're really just not interested in doing this." It wasn't the money. They just thought that shows like that were going to serve the gaming. Everything is to serve the gaming, and as a result, every show that came in had to be really cut down.

They started bringing in some big musicals in the casinos. They brought in *Hello, Dolly!* with Carol Channing. They brought in Dick Van Dyke in *Music Man*. They brought in *My Fair Lady* with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. They were all really cut down to an hour and a half or an hour and forty-five minutes at the very most, with no intermission. You go in and see the show and then you go out. Getting there was a part of it.

They stopped doing it because community people were going to see those shows, but people who were going for gambling were not. The community would see the show, get in their car and go home. They wouldn't put a

nickel in the slot machines. That's why those shows died.

What changes had you seen in the UNR Theater Department between the time you left and came back?

When I came back, Bob Dillard had taken over as chairman of the department. He's someone I had met, because I would come back, visit friends, and stop by. I stayed connected with some of the people. So, I'd met him, but I really didn't know him. He brought in a whole different attitude about theater. For instance, the year before I got here, they had done *Fiddler on the Roof* down at the Pioneer. That was the first time a big musical had been done in Reno. It packed them in. They turned people away. They did three performances; it was not enough. People had not seen a show of that scale or caliber in Reno, ever. This is before they were bringing in shows, even the casinos. He had some technicians who were really gung-ho about bringing in those kinds of scales of productions.

Bob was a real strong director who had a real unique set of plays he liked to do. Some of them would be a little bit avant-garde; some of them would be more mainstream. That tended to excite the people a little bit. Things were very unfocused, though, and he was the first to admit it. When I came in, he said, "I want you to take over managing director of the theaters, because I don't deal with the money or the organization. Those are not my skills."

I was only working half-time, but I was taking over a lot of responsibility to put a shape on things. I didn't do any shape the first year. I was just here holding things together, because there were all kinds of people directing. One of the technicians would direct

this one, another technician would direct that one. It was just messy, messy, messy.

Bob really wanted those people to make an exit, and they did at the end of that year. After that, things changed dramatically. We developed the way things were going to shape, and how they were going to be done. We hopefully gave a little more focus to the way productions should be staged, cast, and put together. We didn't do late nights. We would leave at ten-thirty. We weren't here all night. We ran banker's hours, except our bank opened at night.

After that first transitional year, who else was in the department besides yourself and Bob Dillard?

Remember, it was a combined Speech-Theater Department, and Dr. Miller was still here that first year when I was only on half-time. I just stepped in and everything was already in motion. I was sort of just on treadmill with everybody else. Dr. Miller retired after that year and then I came in full-time.

We hired new technicians. Tom Pruett and Russ Suitor came in as scene designers. They both kind of ran the shops. It was just the four of us. Bob and I directed, and these two guys did the sets and the lights and ran the shop. We did all the classes and everything else.

We had no costumers. The costumes were what I call high school productions. That's where people bring stuff in from home or maybe you'll get a student who's particularly interested to design one. They were really catch-as-catch-can.

Then we had the whole speech component happening at the same time. By that time, though, speech and audiology had jettisoned,

along with radio and television. It was just speech and theater. I was teaching basic speech for one year. Then, I did not do that afterwards; I just taught theater. We didn't have those other components and we didn't have to take courses from the other curriculum anymore.

So people were able to focus more on theater and speech.

Absolutely.

So there were the four of you working on theater and the speech people were on their side?

We always had an incredibly good relationship with the Speech Department, but we were still just like two departments. They gave us total autonomy. We did all our own evaluations and our own curriculum. We just turned it in to the chairman and he would rubberstamp whatever we would do. It was quite amicable, but it was not like a regular department. It was like we had our department and they had their department, and we shared a secretary and a chairman.

So, it was quite amicable, but we didn't have much to do with them and they didn't have much to do with us. I mean that in the best possible way, not with any negative. It's just that we weren't in the same discipline. It was just one of these freaks of history that we were in the same department.

You had a memory you wanted to share?

Yes. It had something to do with theater, but it's just sort of about how the campus worked. When I first started here, the library was where Clark Administration was, and the new library was being built. They had all the fraternities and sororities come down and we

moved all the books from the old library to the new library. It was just on a Saturday. We got wagons and carts and carted the books from one place to the other. I can't even imagine that happening today, but that goes back to the art collection, doesn't it? Can you imagine security and all the issues which we would be concerned about today, which were not issues then? That was interesting, so I just thought I'd throw that in.

At the time you came back in the early 1970s, you were involved in getting Nevada Repertory started. Can you tell me about its founding and what function it served?

The first year I told you about was 1972 when I came back, which I thought was kind of a chaotic year, but everything was already in place. I just merely joined in with everybody else. We did six productions that year. Some of them were being done by technical staff; some were done by directorial staff. Bob Dillard had written an original script.

Then we did a big production down at the Pioneer. Because *Fiddler* had been such a hit, we knew we had to do something again the following year. We did *Hello, Dolly!* at the Pioneer, which was not quite the same hit, but it was a major production scale.

After this year, which was kind of chaotic, it took that long for Bob and me to develop any kind of rapport with one another. We were just ships passing in the night doing our jobs that first year and trying to make sense out of the chaos around us as the year progressed and as things went along. The gem of the idea is his; it's important to realize that. He said, "I think we ought to maybe think about organizing this thing in a different way, because there's a lot of community talent." Reno always had a lot of community talent, and our kids could learn from working with

experienced people, some of whom had professional work and had done a lot. That would expand the quality of the productions we could do. It would open up the door for community participation, which would be good for the university interacting and would hopefully draw in audiences.

The thought evolved, and this is where we brainstormed back and forth. Again, we were young and stupid. We came up with the whole idea of the Nevada Repertory Company, which was going to be a company of actors, directors, and technicians. People who would act in one show would provide technical support for another. That way we would have enough manpower—person power—to do all the work that's required on a production. We didn't have enough people to do that before. This was a way of opening the door and getting people from the community, people from across campus, and students all interacting together.

In the first year—again, this was so crazy—we would do three shows in a weekend. We would do one show on Friday, change the sets, do a different play on Saturday, change the sets, and do a different play on Sunday. They weren't easy plays either. We did *Ah, Wilderness!*, which was the first show in the building in 1960. We thought, fittingly enough, it would be nice for it to be the Nevada Rep's first show. It was.

Then, Bob Dillard did *Old Times* by Harold Pinter and I did Euripides' *Bacchae*. We were doing what anyone would say was a solid season, but we were doing them all in a weekend. The idea was that hopefully people would come to the popular comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*, and then say, "Well, let's go to one of the other ones." Hopefully we would pick up audience members to see a variety of shows. People always are drawn to the popular shows or the musical, so we just needed to find

some way of encouraging them to see some of these other things.

Well, we just about killed ourselves off, because all the sets were full productions. Bob Dillard's *Old Times* was done on stage like in a black box so that the audience would see it onstage. We had to completely change the lighting from proscenium to black box for each production. We just about killed ourselves; we just about did ourselves in.

I told you we didn't have all-nighters, but we did that year just to get the season going. Of course, we did not have the residual effect that we wanted. People did not come and see *Old Times* or *The Bacchae*, but they all came to see *Ah, Wilderness!*

That was our first attempt. The next year we thought, "Okay, we just need to refine this a little bit better," so we didn't have quite that difficult a schedule. The sets were easier to work with. That year we did a big musical, *No, No, Nanette*, which pulled people in like crazy. We thought, "Oh, great, that will bring people in for the other shows," which were Molière's *Tartuffe* and *House of Blue Leaves*. Well, no. *No, No, Nanette* was an enormous hit. *Tartuffe* did okay; *House of Blue Leaves* was too edgy and did not do as well. We learned a lesson or two. We were not doing quite as adventurous set designs and everything else. Things were easier, and we weren't doing all three shows every weekend.

The third year we said, "This is crazy. Let's try to pull back a little bit on this."

So, we ended up still doing three shows, but we spread them out over the semester. Then it kind of evolved. We still called it the Rep; we still had the same people doing tech on some shows if they were acting in another. If you acted in a show, you had to do tech on the show, but that could be a lot of things. Some of the ladies in the community said, "I work during the day." Well, they could do

house managing at night, then. It worked out that way. It kind of evolved into a different setup where not everybody was involved every single night. It got more relaxed as we went along, but that was the beginning of it all.

What is the relationship of Nevada Repertory to the Theater Department?

The boilerplate that I've always used is it is the producing arm of the Theater Department, and there was a class associated with it. Students could take Nevada Rep and get credit for working on the productions, acting, building sets, working on costumes, and doing publicity. That's evolved over time, too. Students would also learn by extension. For instance, if you were taking an acting class, then hopefully, by exposure, what you learned in class, you would be able to put into effect in the play.

Again—I don't want to say this wasn't controversial—the people in the community would come in and do roles. Sometimes students would say, "I should have had a chance at that role." Not always, but mostly, the people from the community would be playing fathers, mothers, or grandparents, and the students were playing the younger generation. That's sometimes been questioned, though.

So the productions that had previously just been a part of the Theater Department then—

It used to be called University Theater. It was just called University Theater Productions. University Theater Presents, suddenly became the Nevada Repertory Company and they were done with this idea that people would be working on all the different shows. You wouldn't just come in and do one show and

then leave. Your commitment was to the whole season in doing the various capacities.

How have the seasons evolved in terms of how many plays you're doing, when you're doing them?

As I started out, we were young and crazy. They would start off with three. We'd open a show and it would play the first weekend. Then we'd add another show the next weekend, and then another show the third weekend. So we would be doing three weeks of openings, which was killer. Then as it has evolved to now, I'm not even sure that the Nevada Repertory name fully applies, because people can audition for a show and just be in that show. They don't have to do tech as they used to, but the numbers are much higher now than they used to be. The rationale that was in place for creating all this has somewhat disappeared. There's a lot more students in the department now. I'm not even sure how many people in the community are involved right now. I think it's all students—maybe from other departments—but there's a different dynamic in place. Certainly, if you act in a show you don't have to do tech on another one.

How did you go about choosing plays?

We looked at it and we discovered a formula. We didn't know the formula existed until after we had done a number of seasons. Something old, something new, a musical, and something different; those were the four slots [in the formula]. We cut back to four shows; we just couldn't do the five or six, so we tended to do a musical. Bob Dillard tended to do the musicals, although I've done my share as well. He has a great love for Sondheim and would usually find a Sondheim show that he

felt he could cast and wanted to do. That's the other major consideration—finding a show that will bring in an audience and be able to have people to play the roles.

From there, we try to find something to be a companion with that. Usually, if we're doing a big musical, then we want to do a smaller show in juxtaposition with that. So, that might be the something different. It might be avant-garde or maybe have a cast of six or eight. We rarely could afford the luxury of a cast of six or eight, because we have so many people who want to be on stage.

Next, we always tried to find a classic; that's the old. That could be anything from the Greeks, to Shakespeare, to Shaw, or even Brecht or something in the twentieth century. That left us a lot of latitude in making a decision.

Then, we always tried to find something that was cutting-edge, just off Broadway, or had created some notoriety somewhere. That was our formula.

What the director wants to do is another major consideration, of course, is. Usually it's his or her responsibility to say, "Gee, I think I can find the people to cast this show. I think I can put this together."

Within that formula were there ever considerations for audience?

Oh, yes. That's always in the back of our minds. We had to do big box office particularly for a musical. With a classic, we figured that the audience is important. At a certain point, though, I feel we have an obligation to present new material, even though it's not going to be popular. We have to do cutting-edge stuff, even though people are going to say, "Boy, that offended me." We had to do a mixed bag.

It was a joy to work here for thirty years because no one ever said, "You can't do that."

No one said, "The language is too rough in that production. You should not be doing that," or, "This play has nudity. You can't be doing nudity in a university." No one ever questioned any of our choices. Over those years we had maybe two or three phone calls of people who were upset by some material. My feeling is maybe our job is to upset people; it's our job to make them think or to challenge them a little bit. It's not to just do the easy choices all the time.

I really felt there was total support from higher-ups at the university. They didn't like all we did, and they might have wished we had made other choices, but they were very supportive of what we did. They never said, "Hey, you guys, can you tone that back a little bit?"

Can you describe the people who make up the audience in terms of university versus community?

That has evolved over the years and we've spent an awful lot of time trying to analyze it. The heyday years were the 1980s and the 1990s, because we had a lot of well-attended shows, and a lot of that was community people. It was a fair mix. I would guess fifty-fifty. The audience would be half campus, half community.

I think it has evolved now where a lot less community people are coming. Part of that is there's a lot more student talent. There's also less connection with the people in the plays and the plays that are being selected are more specifically directed at university students and not quite as general. We always have done university shows, though. I don't want to imply that hasn't been one of our considerations.

There was a run of ten years where we would do dinner theater. Dinner theater can

only play to 125 people a night. The tickets were \$30 for dinner and the show. The students never went. It was totally community people.

Then, we'd have certain nights when there'd be no dinner so students could come on those nights, but it wasn't the same thing. I always felt that was not a good idea, because it excluded part of who I thought we should be drawing.

They were very popular in the community, though. The university was very pleased with them, because they would bring in large groups who would have a wonderful dinner experience and say, "Rah, rah, university." It served a lot of functions and it was very popular, but it was also controversial in some respects.

Which productions were especially good or maybe especially controversial?

I guess some of the rewarding things were the offbeat things. For instance, I've always had a great deal of fondness for Shakespeare's *Pericles*, which is not one of his great plays. It's what I call my guilty pleasure, because I can tell you all the things wrong with it, but I love this play. So I did it for one year at summer theater and the audiences came and loved it. We had really good audiences, and that made me feel like, "If you're doing some of this stuff that's not mainstream, there is an appetite for it." Some may have never seen that play before, and they had a good experience and loved it. I actually got letters from people saying, "Boy, what an experience that was."

Another controversial thing was one of my favorite shows, *The Normal Heart*, which is now being revived on Broadway. We did it in the early 1990s, and it was a play about AIDS. It was very frank and that was not the sort of thing that was being done. It really

brought things out in a way that I thought was really important. We sold out every night. It was a very popular show, but it was also controversial.

There was another controversial play, *The Heidi Chronicles*, which was very much about women and what has happened to them in our society, and that packed an audience in. It's been very interesting. The musicals tend to have always been popular, some more than others, but some of these other plays have been more rewarding because they come as surprises in the midst of it all.

Another one we did was *Laramie Project*, which is about the killing of Matthew Shepard, which we did the year after it came out. I can't believe we got the rights. I had never even read it. I announced the show without having read the script, because I couldn't get a copy of it, but I could get the rights. People came and said, "This is better than the Broadway production," and we packed them in every night. You just never know.

MacBeth was an all-female cast.

And *Epicene* is the silent woman with an all-male cast.

Can you tell me about that decision process?

It's interesting. It's usually done by saying, "Well, I have an idea for a show I want to do. Do you have a show that would work well with that?" I really liked this play *Epicene* for the longest time, but I thought if I did it in a regular production, it wouldn't make any sense to a modern audience. It was written for an all-male cast, and we never get to do that. So I talked to Sue.

I said to Sue, "I have this show I really want to do, but it's all male, and I don't want to use any women. I think if we do any women,

it just defeats the purpose of doing the play. We have never done a Ben Jonson. He's an important playwright. We ought to do him. Wouldn't it be fun if we did a season with gender reversal?"

We talked about it a lot. A lot of work had been done with women in Shakespeare because women don't have much to do in Shakespeare. He writes great male roles, but women roles are very few and far between. Some of them are very good, but a lot of them aren't. We talked about *Taming of the Shrew*, which would have been an interesting thing with an all-female cast, because it has really interesting issues about women in society and male-female relationships. Sue just really didn't really like that very much, and I can understand that. It has been done a lot, so she felt that maybe doing something like *MacBeth* with an all-female cast— giving women a chance to play some of those roles—would have been a real interesting challenge. Women rarely or never get to do combat.

We just sort of decided to do a gender-bender semester, and we had fifty-four people involved in production that semester on stage between the two shows. We thought, "Whoa!" It was great fun. We had a great time with it. The audiences were okay. They weren't awful, but they didn't flock to see them. We still thought it was interesting way of proceeding, though.

What is the Theater Department curriculum like, and what classes do you teach?

First, I want to talk about evolution of faculty. We topped out at about four people early on in the 1970s, and then things changed and people who were technicians suddenly became actual faculty. Then, in 1976, we got an actual costumer, Gini Vogel. She was a brilliant costume designer, and her work

made the productions leap up to a level that they hadn't had before. We were no longer doing high school costumes. We were doing university-level costumes with really excellent design. We had people who could do sets and lights as well, and that was pretty much true throughout the 1980s and the 1990s.

So, we added faculty. We had been promised more for twenty years and never got them. What happened was that as faculty came in...For instance, Gini came in as a costume person, and there was no costuming curriculum. So that became her interest— evolving a curriculum that supported her discipline naturally. We have a scene and lighting designer who came in. In our case, it's one person doing both jobs. He started developing curriculum to support lighting and set design, which we never had before. That opened up half of the department, but we needed more faculty. Bob Dillard taught all the acting classes and the directing classes. There was one person teaching all of that, and I was teaching beginning classes and managing the department. Then I did the Theater History classes, the Styles of Acting class, and the Experimental Acting class. There were only four of us teaching all of this.

One of the things that was happening before these budget cuts was that Rob Gander, the new chair, was trying to get more acting specialists in. This way, people teaching and focusing in theater history may do beginning acting, but would not be doing the more advanced acting. So, there would be more development in terms of the kind of courses available.

We have technicians who are experts with automated scenery, so now a courses are being offered in automation and automated lighting, which were not there before. These things have evolved with time. Again, it's based on

the personality that comes in and what they are interested in developing.

It sounds like there's freedom within the department regarding curriculum development.

Absolutely. There always has been, if you have a particular interest. We always have a couple of opened courses. A lot of departments had seminars, but we had a workshop where you could do pick any topic you wanted to for a semester and develop some interest.

How many people are in the Theater Department today?

It is devolving rather than evolving. The other thing that has happened now is there are a lot of LOAs [letters of appointment], which hadn't been there before. I'd say there are about seven or eight people. That includes the LOAs and people who are brought in on a temporary basis to teach costuming, because we lost our costumer. She left at the beginning of the season two years ago, and they didn't give us money to replace her, but the positions are there. There are three technicians, three acting directing, plus three LOAs; that's nine.

In terms of its location—with speech as well as what college it is in—has that changed over the years?

This year it became its own department. It became Theater and Dance. It had started way back in the 1930s as a part of the English Department, though. Then, it evolved this weird Speech/Theater/Radio/Television/Audiology Department which was sort of taking care of all of these other disciplines. That eventually evolved into Speech Theater, which

then became Theater and Communication Arts. Now, it's Theater and Dance.

Is it in the College of the Arts?

We're in Liberal Arts; the School of the Arts is within Liberal Arts. School of the Arts is music, art, theater, and dance. I think Black Rock Press is thrown in there as well. I don't understand why, but it's in there. Speech was there as well, but now that they're out of it, they're no longer. They were part of the School of the Arts for a while there, though, because they were tied in with us.

Have any of these administrative changes had any effect on the Theater Department?

I don't know what has happened since I retired last July. Dance became a part of the department last July. I'm sure that has made a difference. It had to have made a difference because, speech and theater had nothing in common except the secretary. Now, all of a sudden, you have dance, which actually does have something in common [with theatre]. I'm not sure what the dynamics are for planning. Now, since they're both potentially going away, it would be very difficult to argue for a new faculty for one without arguing the same for the other. All of that has to be very difficult.

Who have been the department chairs over the years?

When I first came, Jim Owen was the person who got me my job. He is still on the faculty of the Speech Department, but he was chairman of the Speech Department first.

Paul Page and Gordon Zimmerman [were both chairmen] for a while. Dave Seibert was the chairman for the absolute longest time, though—around twenty years. He was

supposed to resign every three years, but we kept reelecting him by acclimation. It was beyond all the rules, regulations, and bylaws, but we didn't care because he was doing a great job. He was a great chairman and a strong advocate. I'm not saying that wasn't controversial. I'm not saying that there weren't people in the department who didn't like that, and I'm not saying that the university always liked it. In general, though, we were very pleased with that.

When Dave resigned, Gordon Zimmerman came back. Then, when Gordon retired, Rob Gander became the new chair.

Can you tell me about the curriculum and classes that you taught?

The curriculum is basically the same as it was in the 1960s. I'm not saying the subject matter hasn't changed, but in terms of the way it operates, it's still Introduction to the Theater, Introduction to Acting, and Introduction to Tech. Those three basic courses have evolved and become more complex because the key people teaching them are more trained.

The original technical director, Terry Elmore, was a very nice man, but he wasn't a theater person. He was a radio/TV person who was brought in to do tech. So, that was not his field, and the way he taught the course is probably not the same way Larry Walters or Matt would teach it now. They're much more professional and much more experienced. So, those three basic courses have evolved over time, but they're still in place.

After those three courses, we branch out into more selectivity. For example, if you're acting, you might go into Advanced Acting. You certainly would go into directing. You might go into Styles of Acting, and you might go into Experimental Theater Acting, as well as different types of Alexandrian technique,

etc. That would be modern stuff. Those, again, are just new developments based on old models. The same goes for tech. There's all kinds of new stuff that has happened with computers and flexibility with equipment that wasn't possible before.

Theater history has always been part of the curriculum. It was two courses back then, the first began in time up to Shakespeare, and the second covered Shakespeare to modern times. That's what it is now.

During the time I was there, I did other seminars, for instance, in musical theater. I did courses in women in theater. I began to teach courses in cultural context, which go into how theater reflects things that are happening in society, such as black theater, women's theater, and queer theater. Those are products of our time, but there's also student interest in those courses.

So there would be individual seminars where Bob Dillard would do a seminar or a course in musical theater. My course was a historical approach and his was a performance approach. There would also be directing classes, of course.

We have also had Nevada Rep, which has been there since the 1970s, where people are able to get credit for working on the shows.

Have there been any changes in philosophy towards teaching or approaches to theater in the department?

Yes. When I was a student, I'm not sure what the approach was. We did theater and we were all taught to be generalists. That was all healthy, but I don't know if there was any real consideration given to what we were going to do when we graduated. That's a major issue which we have continued to grapple with. What are our kids supposed to do when they get out of here? We can talk all

we want about improving social awareness and enhancing their expressiveness, but their parents want to know if they are going to be able to get a job. That has been one of the ongoing discussions. There's no end to that discussion, and I'm not sure that that's not true of all other departments too.

I would say that an awareness of that has grown with time, so we're much more interested in getting our students involved in apprenticeships and networking with summer theaters which can, somehow or other, open doors for them.

Reno has been a real blessing in that area, because a lot of our people who are technicians went to work in the casino showrooms. They have had twenty to thirty-year careers in the showrooms. That would not be possible if you were a kid in Sacramento, for instance, but our location has [made a difference].

What types of students are you getting, and have they changed a little bit over the years?

Oh, yes. Theatre students are always very passionate. They love what they do—some to the point of being obsessive about it—and I think that's good. That's not criticism. I love working with kids who really care about what they're doing. So many people talk about the kids in their department who could care less about what they're doing, but that's not true of our kids. I mean, we get some flakes, of course, and we get people who are majoring because they think it's going to be easy and find out that it's not, but that comes with the territory.

In general, we have people who really care about what they're doing and are really upset when they don't get the role they hoped they were going to get. That's been always the case, though. Any problems we had in the department always went back to casting. People would say, "I wanted to get this part,

and so-and-so's favorite got it instead." That's been an ongoing problem; it still is a problem.

I think the students, as time has gone on, have become a lot more sophisticated. I also feel that a lot of them come in without basic writing skills, though. The skills in writing and study are just not there. They don't know how to research. If anything, the Internet is a blessing and a curse in that respect, because they figure that Wikipedia is the only source that they need to look into. They figure, if they read Wikipedia, they know everything they need to know. It's really hard to get them to say, "You know, there might be something else that goes a little bit more deeply into this subject that maybe can give you more insight." So there is that change.

Like everybody else, the students are products of the times they live in, and we're definitely in the digital age. They're spending a lot more time being aware of those sorts of things and are using them in their education.

Are there students over thirty-plus years who have stood out for you?

Yes, and some of them have gone on to actually have careers, while others have used that as a steppingstone to find out other things about themselves. Some of the best actors have developed into fine teachers. We have one student who is in the Bay Area, and he does one-man shows. He does shows on Eugene O'Neill or *The Great Gatsby*. He does Sinclair Lewis. This is something he's created on his own—using his acting talent in a way people would not normally think. Then, we have other people who are active professionals and who have been working for thirty years, not only just in acting, but in the technical area as well.

What are some of the biggest challenges that the department has faced over the years?

It has always being competitive for positions and support. From the 1980s to 1990s we had incredible support from the university and from the administration. That was incredible, not only financially, but also because they would come to the shows and bring people. They were really fond of what we were doing and they wanted people who were possible donors to come and see. They were very proud of us. They were very helpful.

Having said that, though, we didn't get the new faculty. We kept being told, "Oh, you're going to get a new faculty member next year." Or, "It'll be next year." That never ever happened though. We felt we were capable of expanding. It just never happened.

What is the current situation for theater? What is potentially happening with the department?

I'm sort of out of the loop since I've retired. I'm not in on the meetings and all I know is what people have read in the newspaper, which is that a proposal is on the table to eliminate Theater and Dance to save money.

It's hard for me to imagine the university without a theater program, particularly when there is a couple million dollars' worth of facility and equipment over there. Do you put them into mothballs? What do you do with stuff that's worth that much money? There won't be anybody around who knows how to use that stuff. The lighting equipment is very specific; it's not just turning on a switch and making it work. It's much more complicated than that, and if you're not going to have people who know how to do that... it boggles my mind.

It seems to me that it's very short-sighted in terms of a full university experience. The university theater produces productions of plays that are being read in core curriculum

classes which gives students an opportunity to see things. A lot of the kids have never been to theater and if we don't have one, we just perpetuate ignorance, which doesn't seem to be very wise.

We're still waiting for a miracle to come along and maybe reverse things, but that's the path things are taking right now.

What have been some of the department's accomplishments over the years?

The fact that we did four USO shows is pretty amazing for a department our size. Also, there is the fact that we did London trips every year for thirty-one years. We took hundreds of people to London and exposed kids to plays they would never have had the opportunity to see on their own, and they came back. Dick Davies used to say, "Once a kid's been to Europe, they are changed forever." I think that's true. They come back and the kids say, "You can't believe what we saw." They really admired the productions they saw, and I felt that was very helpful.

We participated in American College Theater Festival. One of our productions went to Washington, D.C. as one of the best shows in the country, and it was. It was Bob Dylan's production of *Private Life of the Master Race*. It was a wonderful production.

More modestly, we have people who are not going to be stars and people who are not going to have careers in theatre, but they are better people for the experience of having been through the program. They have a better understanding of who they are, greater expression, and a greater awareness of the world around them. They've also had a sense of community that they would not get if they were a math major. I'm not putting down math. I was a math major so I know it's a different experience when you have a group

of people and faculty you're working with and for whom you felt a lot of affection, and who feel a lot of affection toward you.

The modest achievements, perhaps, are even more notable than the major ones. That sort of splinters out into the whole community.

What have been some of the challenges Nevada Repertory Company has faced?

I don't know if they're challenges or if those are just part of the normal experience. Every show has challenges. Getting the right people, getting the right sets, having enough money to be able to do the production with the level of quality you want it to have, and being able to draw an audience, just seem like standard issues. I don't think there's anything unique. I mean, we lost a costumer, and went back to high school costumes again. Or there's the challenge that somebody on the design staff or in the cast becomes sick and we have to shuffle things around. Those are just part and parcel of what we do, and not necessarily extraordinary or worthy of mention.

Is there anything memorable that stands out for you about Nevada Repertory Company?

I mentioned a couple of shows that I thought were pretty memorable. I've liked some of the shows that were not the big stuff. We did a lot of American premieres. We did a production of *Adam Bede*, which is a nineteenth-century George Elliot novel done with a cast of six people which was a great experience. The cast loved it; the audience loved it. It wasn't one of our big hits, but we were the first ones in America to do it.

I saw another play called *Myth, Propaganda & Disaster in Nazi Germany & Contemporary America*, which was a real challenge. It's

all about paranoia in America following the collapse of the Twin Towers. It was an Australian play and it was an American premiere. It wasn't a very popular play, but the cast did an outstanding job and it was a very provocative piece.

Those things, to me, have been worthwhile. If you ask the general public, though, they're going to say, "Oh, I loved *Cabaret*. *Cabaret* was wonderful." Or, "*Into the Woods*, you just can't do better or that." Or, they enjoy *Man of La Mancha*. The general public always likes and has very fond memories of the musicals. When we talk about a season, we always use the musical to say, "Oh, that was the year that we did *Kiss Me, Kate*," because that's the focal point of the year and the other shows flow from it. Those haven't always been our best shows because they're harder to do and you don't always have the talent to pull them off. They're the ones that people remember the most, though.

What awards of distinctions has Nevada Rep received?

Certainly, the USO tours and the production that went back to Washington, D.C., ACTF. We also participated in a number of ACTF productions. It has been hosted here on campus twice, which is an honor that they would find UNR sufficient enough in magnitude to warrant a couple thousand people coming on campus to see plays.

Can you tell me about the local theater companies or groups that you've been involved with?

That has also evolved. Back in the original days, there was nothing but Reno Little Theater. Then, that sort of evolved. There was a Space Theater, which somebody with a lot of money who really wanted to support theater

put that together. It lasted for four or five seasons. That was on Hubbard, behind where the Sizzler used to be. I did some shows with them, and I used to see their productions.

There was also Four Star, which was out on Keitzke in the back of a bar. They were doing one play per month there, and they were doing really good work. I've done work with Bruka [Theater], and they're still going strong. I admire a lot of what they do. I don't love everything, but I admire a lot of it. Bob Barsanti [phonetic] had the Riverfront Theater, and I did a show for him. I did a show at Carson at the Proscenium Players. I've done workshops in Fallon and Carson for theater groups that needed acting coaches or wanted acting exercises.

How would you describe the theater community, those people that make up the different community groups?

I look at theater like shoe stores: the more the better. In other words, there is a model that if you have one shoe store, it doesn't do very well, but if you have a bunch of shoe stores, they do very well in a mall. I think that's also true of theater. When there was more theater in Reno, people were used to going to theater more and there would be people that would go to more productions. I think that economic times have been much more of a challenge because people are not leaving their homes. They've got too much entertainment in their houses. That's one of the things that has changed in the last ten years.

As a result, it's very difficult to get people to leave their homes in the evening, and all the arts are feeling that. This is not just theater. The [Reno] Philharmonic is the only place that's still doing pretty well, but the [Reno] Opera is not doing well. Dance companies are just not drawing in the crowds they used to.

When there were more theater companies, people were in the habit of going to theater and were interested in exploring new things. I feel that's very healthy. I think each theater has its own identity, and a lot of that is determined by the roles that people want to play. Theater companies are formed because people are not getting cast—it goes back to casting—in roles they would like to be cast in, so they form their own theater companies. This way they can get cast in the shows that they want to get cast in, and they can announce the plays that they want to play in.

How supportive is Reno in general for theater? Given the challenges theatre faces for drawing in crowds, how does Reno seem to embrace theater?

I think it's doing less so now. I don't know if it's a cyclical thing or what. Reno Little Theater, a four-hundred-seat theater on Sierra Street, used to play to full crowds. It was a small theater, but it would do pretty well. Bruka plays to seventy people. It's a quarter of the size of the old theater. The population is a couple hundred thousand people and we would say "Why can't we get 1 percent of the people to come to our plays?" It's really difficult.

I don't know what it is that you have to do, but—I'm sorry it goes back to this—it's cultural. We don't educate our kids to appreciate arts—theater in particular—but also music, painting, and dance. All of that is not taught in the schools, and it's the target for any cuts that are going to be made. Those are the first things that go, so you end up developing a whole population that only knows to watch television; they don't know what else to do with themselves. They don't have an appreciation or understanding, and that's very unfortunate. I see that happening more, not less.

Is there anything that you would like to include that I haven't asked you about?

The word I used earlier about acting, was passion. A lot of these people who run companies have passion. They are really devoted to theater. They love what they do, and they put in unconscionable hours. They work in very stressful situations just to be able to do plays, and that's highly admirable.

What is the general quality of the productions?

It just varies. I've seen productions of Reno Little Theater. I saw a production of *The Dresser* with Blair Anthony and Jim Cashell, which was as good as any professional production. I saw a production at Bruka a couple years ago which was as good as any production you would see elsewhere. Other times, people can barely walk across the stage and they have trouble remembering their lines. There is quality work out there, but that is just not always the case. Sometimes, places rise to the occasion and sometimes they just don't.

Since the early 1970s, are there broader changes that you've seen in Reno?

The whole rise of the Internet and cable television make it a challenge to get people to leave their homes. That's been a change in the last ten years. Prior to that, there was an interest in people expanding their horizons and going to see things. I think that change has diminished the potential audience for a lot of these events.

How supportive do you think the city of Reno and this state have been of arts organizations and cultural organizations?

It goes up and down. Right now is a really bad time because the money is so tight. The Nevada State Council of the Arts may not get funded. If that doesn't get funded a lot of the money that has been supporting these arts groups will disappear. The Reno Arts Commission is in trouble money-wise, so they may not be able to fund some projects. A lot of these groups have been really dependent upon public monies. If the monies are not there, it's going to be very dire. All of a sudden, that means all you can do is popular stuff. You don't get to do fresh, unusual things because you don't dare take the risks.

Right now I admire the Philharmonic because their programming. They always do one of the biggies. They're going to do a Beethoven, but they'll also do some obscure piece with it. This way, the audience will develop an ear for unusual music rather than just doing the tried and true popular things. The Opera has had a challenge this year because they've been doing stuff that's— they did *Vanessa*, which no one had ever heard of. People only want to go see operas that they know. It's very difficult to branch out and allow people to have that opportunity to see something new if you don't have the financial support, and you're not going to get that for the gate. You need to have some sort of public support for unusual work. Otherwise, it's all going to be commercial which really diminishes the possibilities.

FRANK CASSAS

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Frank Cassas: Well, I was actually born in Los Angeles in 1940, so that means in about thirty days I'm going to turn seventy-one. My mother came to Reno in 1948. My Great-Aunt Ramona, Ramona Sanchez, right after the Second World War came to Reno to open a little Mexican restaurant down on Lake Street, and my mother came here running from a bad marriage. She came with my aunt and was a waitress there. Her restaurant was called Ramona's Kitchen, and it was a very popular little Mexican restaurant, but she fell on hard times.

My mother stayed, and became a waitress at the Mapes Coffee Shop. The Mapes Coffee Shop was kind of the social center of Reno for many years. That was my first job as a busboy. We grew up here. My mother was a single mother. She worked at the Mapes Coffee Shop for, I think, fifteen to twenty years.

My brother and I went to all the local grammar schools, B.D. Billingshurst Junior High School, Reno High School, and we both

graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno in 1964.

What was Reno like as you were growing up?

Oh, god, it was really small. You can imagine 1948, I was eight years old and started school at Mt. Rose Grammar School. There were only a few grammar schools. We moved around. My mother rented different houses. We grew up on Caliente Street, not too far from where my office is now. My mother's idea of stability was to rent a house in the same neighborhood, so we actually lived in three different houses on Caliente Street through the years when I was in grammar school, junior high school, and then high school.

Reno was a little town with only one high school. There was also Sparks High and the high school in Las Vegas. I remember that. That was it. Most of the schools played football against schools like Truckee, Fallon, and Red Bluff. There were no other high schools. It was small. Everybody knew everybody. It was nice growing up in the Biggest Little City.

I went to my fiftieth high school reunion here a couple years ago. People I went all the way through grammar school, high school, and college together were there. Very few people went away to school. Everybody stayed close. There were a lot of professional people in my class. In my high school class there were at least eight of us that went on to law school, so we not only grew up together, but we had a professional relationship for many years. Now we're all retired.

Can you tell me about your involvement in showing horses and how you got involved in that?

Well, it was something that I always had in the back of my mind, and I don't really know why. I didn't grow up around horses. It's just something that I thought about. I belonged to a group called the Young Republicans, and there was a fellow there that I met named John Stevenson [phonetic]. John Stevenson was working in the Agricultural Department of First Interstate Bank, called Bank of America, I think. I'm not sure about the name of the bank, because they've changed so many times. Anyway, it was back when the banks had an agricultural department loaning to the ranchers. He worked in that department. He had a small herd of cattle, and we got to be friends.

One day he showed up at my office and said, "Frank, I need to get a partner; I've got this herd of cattle." He asked me if he could borrow \$6,000, which then was quite a bit of money, but I had over \$6,000 in the bank. On an impulse, I got in to the cattle business. That is the whole story. It lasted about seven years. It was a whole different world.

In any event, as part of that, I bought a horse for my wife and I bought a horse for myself. We were in the cattle business. We

were going here, there, everywhere. You name it—up and down, and as far away as Elko. We'd haul horses, so I got to be a pretty good horseman. Then there was one event that changed my life forever. I don't know if you ever heard of the Snaffle Bit Futurity, but it is one of the biggest horseshows in the country now.

The show used to be at the Convention Center, the old one, before they built the Livestock Event Center. We used to go to that every year, a whole group of us that were kind of horsey-set people. I belonged to a lot of riding groups, like the Nevada White Hats. My wife and I would go to all these trail rides and got to know all the old folks. We used to keep our horses at a stables called the Flying B—the old Gus Bartley stables there at the bottom of Windy Hill and Lakeside Drive. They were there for many, many years. Now it's a park named after Gus Bartley.

In any event, we used to go to the Snaffle Bit Futurity, and watch reining horses and working cow horses perform. It was a big deal. They always have a raffle horse. For one dollar you could buy a ticket, and in 1978, with five tickets, I won that horse—a filly. The raffle horse is automatically entered into the next year's Futurity, and so, god, this was my big dream. I was going to have a horse in the Snaffle Bit Futurity. This was the biggest thing in my life.

Then I had to find a trainer. The big trainers were Bobby Ingersoll [phonetic] and a guy by the name of Adams. These were the legends of the Snaffle Bit Futurity. In the finals that year, there was a trainer from Fallon named Pat Heaverne. He was noticeable to me because he wasn't as polished, he was a little older and truly a Nevada cowboy.

After interviewing a few trainers I decided I wanted to be closer to the whole thing, and so I took my horse to Pat Heaverne in Fallon.

That became one of the great times in my life. I mean, to me it was a tremendous bonding experience. I was there all the time training with him. Eventually, I started training horses myself and showing horses. I eventually showed a horse at the Snaffle Bit Futurity. Pat was as close to me as a father could be, and he took me under his wing. He was a very proud man, very quiet. He is truly a legend when it comes to the working cow horse and the Snaffle Bit Futurity. He was one of the earliest people to show in that event.

Just to give you some idea of how well-thought-of he is, Pat Heaverne is in the Hall of Fame at the Snaffle Bit Futurity. He is also in the Hall of Fame in the Nevada Horse, and he's in the Hall of Fame for the Cowboy Museum that they have in Winnemucca. He was a true buckaroo. The thing that was so wonderful is that I'm the only person that ever got close to him. I think just because I was a city guy who didn't know a lot and didn't pretend to know a lot, he took me under his wing. I've been with him so many times when people would come into the arena talking to him about this or that. Many horse people know everything about everything. They're a phony bunch, really, and he wouldn't talk to them. He was just casual. He was always working with me because he didn't see me as a threat and I wanted to ride like him.

It was a wonderful relationship I had with him for twenty years. Actually, as I look back on it now, he was my age when he died. He was only seventy. I think he was seventy-one—exactly my age. He had a bad heart. He was a hardworking, hard-living guy. So that was sad.

He showed horses of mine, two of them, in the Snaffle Bit Futurity. He won the all-around working cow horse at the Elko Fair, which is really a big deal. That's the top award you can get. I rode that mare, and started my bridle-

showing career with her. I got one colt out of her that I ride to this day. She's about twelve now.

That was a big deal. The Snaffle Bit and working cow horses, going to these horseshows in Elko and Ely.... I went to so many horseshows, it was just a big part of my life. About the time when I started showing, I became a member of the Reno Rodeo. I think it was 1976 when I started.

Do you remember specifically how you got involved in the rodeo?

Well I think I was still in the cattle business then. I was just about to get out of it. That is a whole different story, but I heard about the rodeo. Boy, that looked interesting to me. I went to the rodeo a couple of times. I remember I took my five-year-old son, just to have an excuse to go, thinking he'd like it. He didn't like it, but I just thought, "Oh, this is cool. I've got to be part of this."

I was a member of the Reno Arch Lions, starting around 1970, because I was president in 1976 and 1977. One of the members there was a guy by the name of Frank Knafele. Frank Knafele was a member of the Reno Rodeo Board of Directors. He is one of the directors. He was kind of high up in the organization. At a Christmas party at my house for the Lions Club group, I took him aside and I said, "Frank, I really want to get into the Reno Rodeo; will you sponsor me?" You needed one of the directors to sign your application. So that's what he did; he sponsored me. He is one of the past presidents also. That is how I got started.

I knew some of the guys in there. Clint Wells [phonetic] was very active in the Reno Rodeo Association. He's a guy I went to grammar school and high school with. We were in the same class, class of 1958. There

were a couple of lawyers that were members. John Key [phonetic] and I have been friends since the days we roomed together in law school, and Steve Walters [phonetic]. I knew a few guys, and we were all part of the horsey set.

Most of the members of the Rodeo Association at that time were kind of like me. We all had horses. We did a lot of trail riding. I was in the cattle business for a little while then—for seven years. We all knew each other in those circles. It's totally different now, but then it was all male, and we were all the horsey folks. We were all the horsey guys. We could all ride. Now it's totally different. In any event, so that is how I got started. I took to it and was really active for many years.

Can you give me a brief accounting of how it got started?

What I tell everybody in a nutshell is that the Reno Rodeo truly was the start of tourism in the State of Nevada. You have to think back to what it was like. There is a whole book on the Reno Rodeo. It was published about ten years ago by Guy Clifton from the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. It's a complete history, more about the internal workings, the cowboys, and all that sort of thing.

What I think is the most fascinating is how it started in 1919, and it's been going on ever since. Of course, it's huge now. The thing that is fascinating to me is that in 1919, the population centers in Nevada were around mining and ranching. The powerbrokers all came from Elko. The big population centers were in Tonopah, Rawhide, and Eureka. There was no Las Vegas. It was nothing—just the desert out there and two roads that crossed.

Reno was kind of a stepchild. There was nothing in Reno except the meadows. There were some cattle around, but Reno was really nothing more than a crossroads to rest up

on your way over the summit. After the First World War, the civic leaders of the community got together and said, "You know, we've got to get some people here. We've got to get things going here. What if we put on a rodeo?" That was just the idea.

Now, there were some rodeos that were fairly significant at that time, that had started a few years before and still survived. Nothing was as big as Reno other than Cheyenne. Cheyenne, Wyoming, had a rodeo, as did Pendleton, Oregon. There was a rodeo in Prescott, Arizona, and there was one in San Antonio, Texas. Everything else was just a little weekend-type thing, but nothing that drew a lot of people, not like those rodeos that I just mentioned.

The civic leaders and the powers to be, names like Mapes, Wingfield, and Moffett (Moffett beef)... got together and said, "Let's put on this rodeo, one that will compete and bring people and tourists."

Well, as it turns out, there were only 4,500 people in the whole little community of Reno and the surrounding area. They drew around 10,000 people. A huge amount of people came for this rodeo, and it was over the Fourth of July. In those days it was truly the Wild West. They had gambling, prostitution, and saloons. It was a really big deal. The idea stuck. This rodeo was put on every year by the local business community.

When you look forward now to things like the Hot August Nights, the Balloon Races, and the Air Races, they are really patterned after the way the Reno Rodeo Association was created and has survived, because it takes the strength of community leaders as volunteers. If you don't have the key people in the community involved, then it doesn't grow and it doesn't persist.

For the Reno Rodeo, when you look back at pictures of the past presidents—they have

pictures of all the past presidents up to 1990—you see, they are the movers and shakers of the community leaders. They all got together and made sure that it was financially viable, because the first directors had to guarantee the purse, the event, and the financial viability. That survived even up to the time that I started. The Reno Rodeo has always had fifty directors, and started that way. It has never changed. We have hundreds of volunteers, but the core group is fifty directors.

Just think about how the Reno Rodeo got started, community guys getting together, and volunteering, being the movers and shakers... of course it has grown substantially from when it started. I think that's the fascinating thing about the Reno Rodeo—it has survived as a community event for so many years with things like the parade and all the traditions that go with the rodeo. For many years during Rodeo Days everybody dressed Western. When I was a kid, that is the way it was. They stopped that because it got a little out of hand. Have you ever heard of the Black Maria? It was a tradition for years and years. People would dress Western during the Rodeo Days, and everybody went to work. If you got caught on the street without Western gear, they had this old vehicle called the Black Maria, a big paddy wagon, that you'd be thrown into. Sometimes you might get stuck in there all day.

The 20-20 Club owned the Black Maria. Well, it got a little out of hand because they were yanking in doctors and professional people off the street, for pete's sakes. [laughs] That was a wonderful tradition, though. I wish we had that. We tried to bring it back one year, but I guess we're too far removed from it.

The Reno Rodeo has grown as a community event and is such a big part of Reno, a really big part. I can talk to you about the changes through the years, because they've been fairly

significant, but the history of the event, how it started and survived, I think, is really the story. That is the legacy of the Reno Rodeo.

How much planning goes into each rodeo, and how has that changed over the years?

It's huge now. It's really huge. All the years I was in the rodeo, starting in 1976, and I becoming president in 1992, during all that period of time we did not have an executive director. The rodeo was always run by volunteers; we had an executive committee and we had officers, but we never had a professional staff. The budget now is well over \$2 million. It must have been a couple of years after I was president, because I was on the committee that selected our first executive director, which is Alan Kingsley. He is still the executive director. That must have been about 1995.

To put on the rodeo now, you've got to remember we have grown to the third or fourth largest rodeo in the country. The rodeo is now in the third week in June. It used to be Fourth of July for many years. It changed to the third week in June because the gaming establishment wanted another event. They had enough people coming here the Fourth of July, so they moved the date to the third week in June, and it's at the same time year after year.

The Reno Rodeo is basically the kickoff of all the big summer rodeos throughout the country, so every top cowboy must come to Reno if he wants to win enough money to make it to the NFR. The purse here is, like I say, the third or fourth largest. The only bigger rodeos are Calgary up in Canada, Cheyenne, Wyoming, and maybe one of the big rodeos down in Texas. Those are indoor rodeos during the winter. The summer season gets kicked off in Reno.

Now, the key is quality of stock. For many years it was Cotton Rosser and the Flying U Rodeo. He is Mr. Rodeo when it comes to the Reno Rodeo. I mean, he is a showman. He raises the best stock.

It got to the point where back in the 1980s, I would say, the rodeo was getting so big that Cotton Rosser could not provide enough quality stock. So now for the Reno Rodeo... Cotton is still the front man, but he teams up with three or four other stock producers so they have the best. In the bareback event, saddle bronc, and bull riding, there are seventy to eighty contestants. When you go to the rodeo and you're sitting in the stands, you are only seeing about a tenth of the contestants. The rest of it is done in what we call the slack, which is during the day when there's nobody there. There are that many contestants, though. You need top-quality stock, so there are about four or five stock producers. Cotton brings them all together.

Then, of course, for the rodeo, there's everything that goes with it—the publicity and the queens. We've always had rodeo queens, contests, and that sort of thing. For the advertising, sponsorships are probably the biggest deal. That is really the key. To get your sign on the gate, I think it costs about \$15,000 now. We have local sponsors and national sponsors. Local sponsors grow every year.

When you go to the rodeo, the flag girls run those flags around the arena and they announce all the sponsors. I'm always amazed at how many new sponsors there are every year. The national sponsors, of course, contribute a big chunk of dough, like Coors and Dodge Trucks. That is all coordinated through the National Rodeo Association.

Just the logistics of getting people in and out of the arena... Concessions are another big income source. The logistics of the parking, putting on a program, having posters—it's a

year-round thing, and now we have a year-round executive director that we've had for many, many years.

The strength of the Reno Rodeo Association, and it's considered one of the top associations in the country, is its committee system. It has a series of committees. I think my biggest contribution to the Reno Rodeo was not the years I was president coming up, but early on when I was on the Bylaws Committee. We did two things that has separated the Reno Rodeo from most rodeo associations. On the Bylaws Committee was Steve Walters—he's a lawyer—myself, and there were a couple of others, and we enacted two changes that were really significant. One was that once you were president, you were off the fifty-person board of directors to make room for somebody else to move up. Secondly, we created the Reno Rodeo Foundation and put in the bylaws that 50 percent of the net income every year goes to the Foundation. Since then, the Foundation alone has grown, has its own executive director, has its own system of volunteers, and has its own function. They all work together, of course.

The theme of the rodeo now is "We Rodeo for the Kids." That has changed significantly as far as sponsorships are concerned and our image in the public. When I started out in the 1960s, the Reno Rodeo was just a big drunken party, and it had been like that for years. [laughs] I mean, that's the truth. It was a lot of fun.

I remember we used to sit around and say, "Look, guys, this thing is growing. We've got to have more. We have to have more of a purpose here than just putting on a rodeo for ourselves." That is what we were doing—we were putting on this big party. It was fun and it was great, but we just finally came to the conclusion that we had to have a charitable purpose.

It took a while. It took a while for the Foundation to go, but that foundation is getting to be the tail that wags the dog. People want to come to the rodeo because they realize that there is a charitable purpose to it, and the Foundation is doing tremendous work in the community. That is a story in itself. Some of the things they're doing is just wonderful.

They have what they call a denim drive, and it goes on all year. They get clothes for abused children. A lot of times the authorities have to take these children who are abused out of these homes, and they show up with nothing. They don't have any clothes. They don't have a toothbrush. They get clothes and get all of these children situated. So that's really great.

Getting back to the committee system, we have a new president every year. We have a very strong committee system. I've been on Grounds Committees. There's the Queens Committee. There's a Program Committee. There's a committee for everything, and those committees have their own little system. The chairmen change who have new ideas and thoughts, and changes happen all the time. Everybody has a chance to be involved.

Getting to be one of those fifty directors, is really a coveted spot, because only one spot opens every year. They take the people that are real leaders, movers and shakers, and dedicated to putting on that rodeo. So as a consequence, we've moved from a three-day funfest to nine full days of rodeo and a big purse—one of the top rodeos in the country. Plus it has all of its features as far as the Foundation goes.

Prior to the Foundation being founded, where was the money going?

It wasn't going anywhere. That's the whole point. The rodeo basically was run to break

even every year, and to get enough sponsors and enough ticket sales to put the rodeo on every year. We never asked for public funds and never went to the City Council and asked for money. The only thing financially that was contributed was for building some of the facilities.

The rodeo facility you see now was almost entirely built by the Reno Rodeo Association. The rodeo grounds has only one event every year, and that is the Reno Rodeo. It's filled to capacity, but they've never found another use for it. They've tried other things, but the Reno Rodeo Association felt that they had to keep building, and they did. That's where some of the money went. In fact, a lot of it went to building. A lot of it was done by volunteers. We'd raise the money. We had a lot of contractor-type people in the organization.

It was just run to break even, though. If it had a modest profit, it was fine; it was saved for the next year. We got to the point where we were sitting around going, "We've got to do something with this money. Come on. We can't just be having a party every year." [laughs]

You mentioned that you had served as president. What does that year of being president entail?

Well, I think it's different for every individual. Some are very hands-on, and want to do and change everything. Some changes are made for the good and some changes are made for the bad. It's one of the main reasons the past president is off the board of the directors, because we saw some abuse and some things that I think were detrimental to the organization.

There are a lot of rodeos that we used to go to. One of the things you do as an officer, besides move up the chairs, is you travel around. I've been to all the big rodeos in the

country, and you talk to all the committee people. We go to the national convention every year.

In Salinas, they have a bunch of old guys that have been running that rodeo for years and years. Salinas is one of the really old rodeos, but it hasn't changed any in twenty-five to thirty years. Same old guys are running it. There's nothing new about it. It doesn't really add anything. There are some big rodeos down in Texas run by some very wealthy men. They run it. That's it. There are a lot of volunteers and a lot of other people involved in the rodeo, but it's controlled by a very small group.

We always felt, in looking around, that that wasn't good. There was a lot of old guys when we started that had the same position for years and years. You couldn't tell them anything different. They ran the grounds the way they wanted to do it. We had these ideas of building some new grandstands. No, they didn't want to do that. Getting the president and the officers to not be so involved because they're heading out was why we changed the rule.

I'll tell you something. It was extremely controversial. This is kind of funny. When I stood up to make the presentation about changing the rules so the past president is no longer a director, this one old guy stood up and said, "Cassas, you're a goddamn Communist." [laughs]

In any event, with that background, when I became president, and the guy that immediately followed me, John Key—he and I went to law school together and we were both in the horsey set—our philosophy was that once you're president, since you're heading out anyway, you should be nothing more than a figurehead. All the work should be done by the first and second vice president and the Executive Committee.

That's the way I ran it. I felt that I had paid my dues. Most of the policies and things that I wanted to happen when I was president were things that I had put in place a year or two beforehand. So once I became president, I went around and just met people, talked to people, and schmoozed all the sponsors. We have a room up above the chutes called the Past Presidents Room, and for all the past presidents, that is our room to entertain our sponsors, people in the community, future sponsors, and all of that sort of thing. That's what I thought the president should do. I still believe that. Some agree with me and some don't. That was John Key's philosophy. The rule changed and made sure that no president could screw up and no president could really affect the final rodeo. A little, but not much.

So I went around. I spent a lot of time with sponsors. During my year was the year that I asked the Rodeo Association to go to the full nine days. That was a big thing, because all these committees are working hard nine full days. Let's just say you're the stalls chairman or you're out in the parking lot. That gets kind of old. It's asking a big commitment, but I think everybody's in tune with it now.

I introduced the Jumbotrons. They were called Jumbotrons, but they're the big video screens. We have video, and you can see the instant replays. It was the year I was president that those came into being, but I had worked on that for two years with the president of Justin Boots. They're the ones that sponsored them. He and I got to be pretty good friends, and every time we got together, boy, I really promoted that. "We really would like to have those big screens." That finally came together, so that was kind of cool.

I think that it's time-consuming. I'm a practicing attorney, so I had to back off a lot of things. I didn't take on any big projects,

certainly no big trials or anything like that. If you do your homework, so to speak, and take that attitude of, "Well, I'm just a figurehead because I'm on my way out," you don't have to spend as much time on it.

One of the things that I learned real fast was, as president, if anything goes wrong, of course they call you, and you have your own offices out there. We have an office out there. I found out that if I showed up at ten o'clock, there were all kinds of problems. Everything was a goddamn problem. If I showed up at three o'clock, everything was solved. Again, that is the strength of the committees. Let the Grounds chairman handle it. Don't bother me. He knows what he's doing. There was a problem with one thing or another....

I'll tell you about an interesting incident that did occur when I was president to, again, show you the strength of what the rodeo is to the community. I don't know if this has happened since, but there was a terrible incident with some gangs. I'm trying to remember who the Chief of Police was. I knew him because I was representing the City of Reno in a lot of their labor disputes with police and fire. We had some real serious gang scares, and I was really concerned because it was getting press. The last thing we need is some kind of big gang thing. People won't go to the carnival and they won't come to the rodeo.

As officers, we were all kind of huddled up. What are we going to do? The next thing we knew the police chief, without us asking or anything else, literally got those gang guys and really roughed them up. I mean, they were slamming them against the walls, and they made it known that they were not going to tolerate any disturbances.

So I went to see him to thank him. He said, "Frank, this is one of the biggest events in Reno. We cannot have this event disturbed in

any way. So you don't worry about it. We have this totally under control." I just practically got on my hands and knees and thanked him. Again, it is such a big event and people bring their children and all of that. We encourage that big time, and so the police were really looking out for us and we really didn't even have to ask them. I thought that was really neat.

Can you tell me about the special events that are planned in association with the actual rodeo competition?

Well, yes, the parade has been a tradition for years and years. We try to get more and more horse events in that all the time. There is a pancake breakfast put on by the Lions Club. The big events are done indoors in the Livestock Event Center, which was built in the 1980s to 1990s primarily to handle the Snaffle Bit Futurity and a lot of other horse events. Since it was built right there next to our rodeo grounds, there were a lot of events that started indoors.

The biggest one is on the Monday after the start of the rodeo—the Bob Feist Invitational Roping. It's the biggest roping competition in the country with big bucks. That's all for the professional cowboys. Then the next two or three days is the amateur roping, and that is getting to be as big as the professional roping. It's really a big deal. They get hundreds of ropers and these weekend team ropers. That's a big deal. They have cutting events in there. They have drill team competition. Our drill team...these drill teams from other places come in. Oh, god, there are so many different horse events inside that facility.

What are the events that you have to have at a rodeo, or the bigger events that draw a lot of people?

Well, the rodeos are sanctioned by the National Rodeo Association. It sets the requirements for the competition. You must have calf roping. You must have bull riding. The traditional events are bareback, saddle bronc, bull riding, team roping, calf roping, barrel racing, and steer wrestling. Those are set. You can put something else in there. We used to have a wild horse race. They called it a wild horse race, but it was three guys trying to get a wild horse, to put him down and ride him. There were too many accidents and too many injuries, and they stopped that. Then they have the businessmen's steer decorating, where you tie a ribbon on the tail of a steer. That is a little extra thing that we've added. The events that I've described are the ones that are necessary to sanction the rodeo, though.

For barrel racing, is there a men's competition and a women's competition?

No. No men. No men barrel racing. It is just for women.

Are there other events that women compete in?

There are no women in any of the rough stock events. A woman can compete in the team roping, and there's some pretty good team ropers. You'll see maybe two or three in the team roping at the Feist, but there are no women in any of the rough stock events, certainly not bareback and all of that.

I thought it was kind of interesting, in looking at some of these old pictures, way back when, women did compete in saddle bronc and so on so forth. It was interesting, but you don't see it now. I don't think it's allowed.

While we're talking about that, this is a little digression. Talking about women, one of the other significant changes that I failed

to mention is the participation of women in the Reno Rodeo Association. When I was president, and all the years that I was in it—twenty-some years—there were no female members. We had none. Why? I don't know. It was kind of a sexist society.

It wasn't until maybe five years after I was president that women slowly started becoming members. Now we have a number of members and we have a few female directors. I don't think it's going to be long before we have a female president. I think that would be the ultimate culmination of a true community participation event. Like I said, when I started, we were all kind of the horsey set. Now there are very few horsey people in the Rodeo Association. It's very much a professional organization. We have people with some true talents in marketing and accounting and all the things that you really need for a big organization, and women are a big part of that. They have contributed tremendously.

We have a big handicap program for handicapped children, the Exceptional Rodeo. I think it was started by one of our female members, and that has grown tremendously. It's just a wonderful event. It's tough to watch, but it's a wonderful event because they have these handicapped children. The professional rodeo cowboys themselves come out and participate. It's really cool. In any event, they're bringing a new dimension and some new ideas, and I think it's for the best, myself. There is some resistance, but it's going to change, like every other organization.

I was reading about some of the special titles that are given at the rodeo, like the grand marshal and rodeo queens.

Well, you always have a grand marshal. It's just always been a tradition to have a grand

marshal of the parade. It can be a politician, a governor, or a movie star. It can be anybody. I can't even remember who the grand marshal was the year I led the parade. The queens, of course, have always been a part of the rodeo. We don't really have any other titles.

What different awards are given out at the rodeo for the actual rodeo itself?

For the rodeo cowboys, the coveted prize at the finals is the Silver Spurs Award, and that is a tradition that goes way back. The Silver Spurs at the Reno Rodeo—the money's wonderful, but that's what they ride for. If you have the Silver Spurs, that means you've won at Reno, which is a big deal for these guys. It's a big rodeo. It's a big prize.

For the committee, they have an annual awards banquet, and it's to award various prizes and mementos for committee work. I have won so many different things—knives, saddles, bridles, and all kinds of things. They always have the Committeeman of the Year and all of that that keeps the troops enthused and hoping that they get it.

I'll tell you a funny story. When I started in the rodeo I asked Frank Knopf, "Well, what's a good committee to get on?"

He said, "Well, get on the Parade Committee. You get to ride in the parade and it's fun." Then I found out that if you are the Parade chairman, along with the officers, you get introduced at the rodeo and you can ride into the arena with the officers. Boy, I wanted that in the worst way, so I stayed on that committee until I was Parade chairman and then I got to get introduced. [laughs] I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. It's those kind of things that keep the committee people going, and because I was Parade chairman that year, I earned a silver buckle. I still have it. I wear it all the time. It

keeps the committee people going. They have all kinds of awards. They give out buckles and a lot of things like that.

I created the first newsletter. It still goes out. It's called *The Bull Sheet*, and I wrote it for many years. I was given a silver feather, like a silver quill, by Lee McKenzie, who was president at the time. I have things like that. I have them hanging on my walls at home.

How have the city and the business community invested in the rodeo and been involved?

We don't ask for any financial support, and haven't for years. I don't know if we ever have from the city, other than the convention authority participating to help build the facilities at the fairgrounds. The involvement of the community is primarily through the sponsorships, and the rodeo is used by the business community primarily for entertainment and to promote their businesses, like the hotels and the casino. They promote the Reno Rodeo in San Francisco and Sacramento, and there are people that come and stay at the El Dorado every year.

When I was going around giving talks, I found the best way to entertain somebody from out of town, was to take them to the rodeo. They get to dress up, put on a silly hat, and have a few beers. It's a fun thing to do. We have found that that is the reason so many local businesses are involved, because they can entertain their clients and build business relationships. There is nobody that sits at a rodeo and doesn't have a good time. It's just a fun thing to do.

Then we carry that one step further. If a casino says, "We really have an important VIP here. Can one of your past presidents take him up to the Past Presidents Room?" God, they love that. We're happy to do that. That's our job; we help people entertain their business

contacts and their clients, because that, in turn, helps with our sponsorships. We come back and ask the El Dorado for a contribution of \$15,000, and they're more than happy to do it. I think that is where the rodeo has become really a part of the community.

The one thing that I learned when we went to the nine days, in answer to, "How are we ever going to fill the stand with 9,000 people?" is that people come back two or three times. It used to be you go to the rodeo once and that was it. Now people are coming back two or three times because they're bringing their friends and their relatives. You'll have a whole office party come to the rodeo. Everybody goes and has a good time. You'll get all of your clients together and entertain them at the rodeo. That was been, I think, the thing that has really grown over the years. It is the strength of the organization and will be the strength going forward—so many people use the rodeo for so many different things.

What is the difference between professional and amateur cowboy?

Well, about the only amateur thing is the team roping, and that is done indoors. Everybody who rides in the rodeo is a member of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. You have to be a professional. There are no amateurs who ride in any of the events. In fact, I don't think we're allowed to have any amateurs.

We had an exhibition one time. The only exception I can remember is we had this young kid from Elko that was the high-school bucking-horse champion, and they let him buck a horse against somebody. I can't remember who it was, but it was just an exhibition. There are no amateurs who ride in the event. You have to be a member of the PRCA.

How has the purse size grown?

Oh, god, it's huge. We put up a lot of money. That is how they rank the rodeos. How big you are is how much money you put up. The cowboys have a big entry fee. They ride against each other, plus the added purse... that's how the purse goes. We've always put up one of the biggest.

The PRCA has a very structured way of determining the payouts. Basically, the way it works is... let's just say saddle bronc. They put up an entry fee. There are seventy riders and they all put up an entry fee, plus our committee adds to a total purse. Let's just say there's \$100,000 for saddle bronc. It's broken up into performances, and you have to ride two events to get to the finals, so then the top guys... the way it's paid out is you have one through five of the top guys every day get some money. The next day you have day money, and then in the finals you have an average for all three. You have to make the finals to get the average. The average is the top payout. At the finals, every night the guy who wins makes about \$15,000. He can do that for all three, so he can make quite a bit of money. Everything is geared, of course, to get you to the finals at Las Vegas.

Are there cowboys who compete in multiple events?

Yes, there is a couple. There are some famous ones. Ty Murray rode all three stock events, as the world's champion, all at one time. It's not done too much anymore.

There is a whole group of cowboys who are bull riders, and outside the traditional rodeos, there is all the extreme bull riding that is put on. It's bigger than a lot of rodeos. It's the extreme bull. There is a lot of money in that, and there are guys who do nothing

but specialize in those types of events. They don't have time to do anything else, and their longevity isn't very long. [laughs] They're all young and strong, but, boy, they ride a lot more than they used to. The bulls are bred, so they're getting harder and harder.

Usually the guy who is the all-around cowboy is a roper. He's a calf roper or a team roper. You have to be in two events. It's rare to have a guy be a bucking horse, saddle bronc, and a team roper. Once in a while you'll have that, but I think the guy now who has been the all-around at the NFR for the last three years has been a calf roper and team roper. All he does is rope, and he's in the finals in both events every year.

I think the day of the multi rough stock guy is a thing of the past. It's too hard a sport. It's too rough, they have to travel so much, and the stock is getting harder and harder. It's like everything. Specialization is the key. You specialize in one thing if you really want to be the top guy.

You mentioned one of the big changes when you became president was going to a full nine days. How do you fill those nine days?

I think people are coming back more times. They're coming back two or three nights. They're using the rodeo more as an entertainment vehicle than they have in the past. I think that's the biggest change and that's why it's full. We're also getting a lot more out-of-town people. The casinos and the community is promoting are more outside, getting more people to come up here for rodeo time. You can travel from the Bay Area and come up here for two or three days now, instead of just a weekend.

I just think the community is becoming more and more involved. We have so many people that have moved to Nevada over the

last ten or fifteen years that didn't grow up here. They don't know what a rodeo is. They've never seen a horse get bucked out of a bucking chute. So they go, and say, "Wow. This is cool. This is the Wild West." They're people from back east and places like that. Even some committee members that worked someplace else and now live in Reno had never seen a rodeo before.

My daughter married a fellow back in Richmond, Virginia, and she talks about the days she was a teenager when I was president. They have a lot of fond memories. He said, "Oh, I'd love to see one of those. What's it like?" They just don't know. We have a lot of people now that are just totally enthused with the rodeo and the whole concept of the Western lifestyle that had never been exposed to it before. We see a lot of that.

As the rodeo has gotten bigger, do you have more events or do you have more people that are competing in those events? How does that fill the time of the rodeo?

Well, we can only have a rodeo for about two hours max. That's why so much of the actual rodeo competition is held during the day in what we call the slack. If you just wanted to see real rodeo with no crowd, you could go there during the day. You would see, instead of ten horses being bucked, maybe fifty. I mean, it's just too big. The rodeo is too big to put it out in front of a crowd. People's attention span is only so big, and it has to run like clockwork. One event follows the other. There is no downtime. Two hours is about the most you can have. We could run the rodeo all day long, but it wouldn't be fun anymore, so we cut it down. Unfortunately, a lot of cowboys never get to buck a horse in front of the crowd unless they make the finals.

You mentioned Cotton Rosser, who brought the stock himself for many years. Can you tell me more about the stock itself, what kind of animals he's bringing and how they've changed over the years?

The biggest thing is the breeding. Cotton Rosser is a big stock producer, but he's also a big breeder. As time has gone on, that breeding program has been taken over by his children. All of the other stock producers that are part of this association are all breeders. People think the animals are abused, and they're not in any way abused. One of the neat features, when you go out to the rodeo, is they always run out the mares and their babies. People love to see the mares and the babies. It's awesome when you see everything together like that... I mean, they have bucking horse mares that are bred to raise bucking horses, running with their babies. If you know anything about animals, you know an abused animal won't perform. When hunters hit or hurt their dog, it won't do anything for them. Bucking horses are the same way. They breed the animals for a specific purpose, and bulls the same way. They breed those bulls to buck.

That has changed. In the old days, it was just some rank animal. They never knew what they were going to do. They might fall over backwards. They might do something stupid. You can't have that. You've got to have horses that go out, and they know that if they buck, somebody's going to pull that rider off of them. The horse always wins. That is how they teach those horses to buck. If the cowboy is just left on there, the horse will stop bucking. You can't have that, so that outrider, when the eight seconds are up, is out there yanking that cowboy off the horse. The horse always wins. That is a big part of it, and the breeding is a big part of it.

They don't just get rough stock like they used to in the old days. In the Wild West stuff you would see horses fall over and other wrecks, but they don't have that anymore. It's truly a professional sport. It's professional on the part of the stock producer. It's professional on the part of the riders, and they expect the quality stock. That is why so many of these horses and bulls from the Reno Rodeo wind up at the national finals, because we have the best.

The world of the professional cowboy and the world of the organization that puts on the rodeo... It's kind of strange, but we're too entirely different people and organizations. The cowboys are not invited to any of our events. They don't show up to any of our events, other than the ones that are for signing autographs and that sort of thing. The cowboys themselves aren't really a part of putting on the rodeo. They're there as contestants, and when their night is up, they're on a plane or in their pickup truck heading out of town. They don't go to any of our social events and we don't go to any of theirs. They're all these young athletes. We have nothing in common.

That's what it takes to put on an event of this size, though. You've got the professional cowboys who do their thing, and the committee people, we do our thing to put it on. We get somewhat involved, but I've told you about everything I know about bulls. [laughs] I don't really get involved in the professional side of it, other than how it comes together.

Are there other changes that you've seen in the association over the years that you've been involved?

It is becoming much more of a professional organization. The charitable foundation part

of it is really growing, and has really grown tremendously since my days.

Are there specific organizations that the Foundation gives money to?

Yes, there is quite a list, and I couldn't tell you all of them. They have their own staff. They have an executive director. Some of the charities, like the one I was mentioning for the children, they're very active with the Marvin Picollo School. One of the sponsors, Perry Di Loreto, built an indoor barn just for that riding program. He is a big contributor to the Foundation. There are some pretty big sponsors. We have an annual dinner when they introduce all of the various charitable organizations they sponsor, like school programs and all kinds of things. There must be twenty, I just couldn't tell you the current ones.

Which local businesses have been involved in the rodeo over the years?

All the casinos have been very big sponsors and still are. All the car dealers. During the rodeo or close to the rodeo, you'll see all the TV ads. Everybody who is promoting anything has got a cowboy hat on. They're selling cars. Whatever is being sold is always connected with the rodeo. Again, it's a marketing device for them. Construction companies, hotels, local doctors, and things like Coke and beer. Just about every part of the community is represented. Big sponsors for rodeo traditionally have been the casinos, the car dealers, all the liquor companies like Jack Daniels, and soft drink companies like Coke. Everything that is marketed to the public in a festive way is one of the sponsors. We now have a lot of professional organizations. If you picked up a program and just started flipping

through the pages, you'd see almost every aspect of the community sponsoring an ad or a local sponsor.

To wrap up, beyond the Reno Rodeo Association itself, what are some of the broader changes that you've seen in the rodeo over the years that you've been involved?

Its growth, like I said, and it's just really become a fixture in the community. It is just one of those things that has endured for so many years. Like I said, the beginning of it and the strength of it now, is just a part of the fabric of the community. I can't even imagine not having a rodeo every year. That's the thing—it's been going on for so long.

The community itself has changed so much. The thing that is so interesting is that whole Western tradition, it's kind of gone in a lot of ways, but it survives through a rodeo. It's like it's your heritage. I think that's why people, when they go, have so much fun. People think, "Oh, my goodness, this is what it was like a hundred years ago. There are still cowboys out there." It's just something you don't experience all the time. I do to a certain extent, because John Key, that fellow I mentioned earlier, now runs a large ranch his father started up in Elko, which I go to every year for a big branding event. I still do all that, but most people never experience that. The only time they really get close to a so-called cowboy is at the rodeo. [laughs]

Allison Tracy: To start out, can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Neal Cobb: I was born in Washoe Medical Center on May 16, 1939. I'm a Reno native. Of course, I grew up here, too. I went all through the public school system, which used to be the Reno School District till 1957, when it was taken over by the county. I started off in one of the four schools in the Spanish Quartet, which is what we called them. A lot of the other folks like to tone that down and call it the Four Sisters, which we didn't go for. The schools were Orvis Ring, McKinley Park, Mary S. Dotzu, which I went to, and the Mt. Rose School. When they changed the high school and built it in 1950, and opened up in 1951 with the first graduating class of 1952, they made the old high school on West Street a junior high school, so it fit in.

We had three junior highs then: Billinghurst, North Side Junior High, which is where the bowling stadium is now, and we had Central Intermediate, which was really confusing, because after you add the name

Central...the original school that was there in 1878 for the classes of 1879 was called the Central School. When you go back to the same word, Central, it confuses people, "Oh, I know about Central School." Well, actually, you don't. [laughs] It was the same property, though, which is a lot of good history as far as the school system. So I went all the way through in Reno High. I was out of the class of 1958.

Do you remember any art, music, or theater programs in any of the schools that you went to growing up?

Oh, yes, we all had them. You were almost forced into being a part of a little band, starting in kindergarten with your tambourines. As you grew up, they got a little bit more sophisticated. Of course, we had stage plays and stuff. If you weren't an actor, you were somebody that helped with the scenery, which I was way better at than being any kind of a lead man, or even a backup lead man. We were all happy, though. We all

worked together and it was something that you could see the end result.

That is when you got a chance to have all of the parents there, and they met each other because they all had to come to watch their kid in these programs. That went all through. We had wonderful programs up at Reno High School. They got pretty serious. You could see where some people were natural-born actors and other people were natural-born painters of scenery. [laughs]

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

My parents were two very talented individuals. They married and divorced three times trying to keep the kids and the family unit together, and I really admired that. Nowadays I don't believe that would happen.

My mom was a very accomplished artist and my dad was an electronic genius and a very talented personality on the airways. He was offered, when we worked back East, the *People Are Funny* job before Art Linkletter. He was that level. He was a pro's pro. There wasn't anybody to back each other up, though. It was more of a competition. Here you had two very talented people that didn't have anybody standing behind them, and it made it tough on them. They covered things quite well, though.

The last and final divorce didn't take place until I was sixteen, and that is when I pulled out of school and I went ahead and joined the U.S. Navy. They were wonderful parents. They did everything they possibly could, and if you reflect back on any of this, you have to understand the sacrifices that people make just trying to take care of you. If they didn't love you, I don't know what love is.

You mentioned that your mom was an accomplished artist. What was her medium?

Portraits were the big deal and she did one of the portraits of Liberace. He was in our basement up at 1260 Ridgeway Court, he and George both. It was one where it featured him and his hands on the piano, with George in the background. It hung above their mantel down there in their southern California house, so that was neat. He was just a regular guy, and I think that was a little time out.

They did that in 1948 when he was performing at the Club Fortune. The Club Fortune later on became CalNeva.

My mom did that, and Sheila Biltz—that was Norman Biltz's daughter—had about three different ones. He was a very prominent banker in town and they really liked Mom's work. She did one in complete miniature of the wedding and the wedding dress with the long trail and all of the lace. She was in there painting that under a magnifying glass. It was something else. There were just all kinds of different, wonderful paintings that she produced, but almost all of them are gone in different places.

I've got one out in my shop that I could show you. It's almost life-size and it's of a nude. The story behind this is that we owned a photo store. My mom would take photos of people and then she would go paint off of the photos rather than having them sit for hours. She would then bring them in to get the flesh tones, the eyes, and everything, making sure she was dead-on with the colors.

Well, this local "artist" (he called himself an artist)—Eddie Starr was his name—went ahead and openly attacked my mom, saying, "She's no artist. She uses pictures and traces."

So she set up this huge canvas in the front window of Modern Photo. That was our store right downtown on 28 East 2nd Street. She did an entire skeleton from memory, and people were watching her while walking back and forth.

She went ahead and put all of the muscles, tendons, and the rest of it on in great detail, and more people are watching, walking back and forth. Pretty soon a little crowd...they're watching this come together, and by the time it got to the girl's skin, you had a pretty good group out there. When she was all done with this thing—it's three layers thick—she stood up and she said, "For Eddie Starr." She then went like this [demonstrates] with the bird.

My mom was five-foot tall and feisty as all get-out. She was a super talented, lovely person, but you did not want to tick her off. You just didn't want to do that. Now we have this life-size nude in my shop up in the rafters, but it's such a great story that goes with it and it's a wonderful memory of my mom. If you can't remember feisty, there's an everyday... there is a big time reminder.

Now you have a life-size nude portrait. [laughs]

Yes, everybody ought to have one of those. [laughs]

What sort of cultural activities do you remember being exposed to when you were growing up?

My mom used to take me down to the different movies that would be of importance, but lots of times she would break that tradition and say, "Okay, now we're just going to go do one that's fun." She liked the religious ones, though, or anything that had Fred Astaire in it. She wanted you to see these musicals and see how talented these people were. She said, "You can be a Raggedy-Ann kid after you get out of here, but right now I want you to see what can be accomplished by somebody that works that hard at being somebody." I always appreciated that.

We used to go to the Reno Little Theater for the live productions that they had when

it was over on Sierra Street, and that was a lot of fun. The first time I ever saw *The Christmas Carol* was there, and it was beautifully done. Other things that would have to do with culture...of course we had an art museum that was right down at the bottom of Ralston Hill, and they're just celebrating that now. This is 2011. They started off in 1931, and there is the big black building that we have now. That is the same art museum. We used to go over there, and they would allow us to go inside and view all of these wonderful pictures and stuff. In all reality, we were just killing time, but we seemed to spend more time, under the pretense of killing time, looking at some very nice things. That and the atmosphere around here, and the way the town was run....

You had the Red Line and the gambling district, but everywhere outside of that was just like Anywhere, USA. You come up Washington Street the second Italian district, and the lawns and the front of the houses were just beautiful. You go around to the back and that is where all the really good stuff was growing. That was all that great produce. The Italians were very generous people. You wound up with more great produce than you could ever really use. Whatever they did, they did from their heart, and so you were part of that. That was part of the neighborhood you grew up with—thinking that the whole world's like that, and of course now we realize it's not.

So you reflect back on just good, wholesome, clean, solid times. These were wonderful times. I'm a very fortunate man. My generation was the 1950s. Hell, rock and roll is still going. We had all of these other things that were so normal—the fishing derbies, the ice skating at Idlewild, and the whole works. There was always something going on: the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Brownies, and Rainbow. Everything

was very active, with the Camporees up there at Galena Creek. We participated in all of those things.

We sold Christmas trees and we did all kinds of stuff to earn our way to go out to different ballgames down in the city. I won prizes as a paperboy and got to sit on the bench next to Leo Nomellini. I was given a white football from 1952-1953, and it's signed by all of the players of that year, so now I've got a football that's probably fairly valuable. It's got eight to ten Hall of Famers. Y.A. Tittle Billy Wilson, Nomellini, Hugh McElhenny are on there. It was fun.

The businesses like the Reno newspaper made things possible too. Everybody contributed just a little bit to make sure that the youth was entertained, and so you didn't really have a huge amount of time to get in a lot of trouble. Of course, you always made a little bit. You've never lived till you've been in a cowpie fight. [laughs] You can really sling them because they get hard on the top but they're still ripe on the bottom. So, you're out there in the field slinging these at each other. I came home and my mom was out in front watering. She stripped me down to nothing and hosed me off. I couldn't believe it—I was so embarrassed. "You're not going in my house." [laughter] That was fun, though.

We lived right near the Highland Reservoir and that was ranch land right below it. Right in back of it was all ranchland where Rancho San Rafael, Costello's Ranch is. All of that went all the way down Vine Street. We had the best of all of the worlds, so to go on a hike was no problem. A block away was adventure land.

Were you involved in the artistic community in Reno through your dad's photography studio?

We did lots of things to advertise and help promote. He did that for the Reno Rodeo, for

the Jaycees, and so on. Like the 1950 flood—they sold a book that is now a collector's item, and if you look through it, about half of the photos are by Modern Photo. They were all donated to the people that printed that book for the Junior Jaycees as a fundraiser.

There would be other activities that were fun to promote and so you would get involved with it. There were good things that happened. Here is a Boy Scout getting his Tenderfoot Badge. That is the lowest badge there is, but here is that kid a-grinnin' in the newspaper. You submitted these things and they were just good down-to-earth everyday events, but they were really big to the people that were involved with them. So, we went ahead and you made things available when we could.

My dad also did a Man on the Street feature and he was wonderful at this. In fact, over at the Sparks Heritage Museum, they have about four of my dad's microphones over there that I've loaned them. There is a picture of my dad and he's out there doing this Man on the Street thing. It was really funny because people didn't really want...they were a little bit intimidated by this guy with this microphone.

I was standing there with my dad one time on the corner of Second and Virginia Street in front of Scheel's Drugstore. This guy sees my dad, so he walks off the curb and goes around. My dad says, "Hey, you got the time?" He's pointing at his watch.

And the guy says such and such a time.

My dad asks "What kind of watch is that?"

The man says, "Well, it's a such-and-such."

First thing you know, he is coming over, talking to my dad. The interview was on. He could get people to relax and talk like nobody else I've ever seen. That was a fun thing to do, and everybody listened to it. There weren't that many radio stations, and it was on KOH that he did that for, so you got your pulse on the town. The interview is your thumb right

there that says, "What's going on?" You're talking to the average Joe.

He also taught me other things that were very important and I work with that right now. He told me this many times. He said, "Everybody in a community is important, whether it's the mayor, the guy that is a soda jerk, or the fellow that's showing you how to use your rifles." He said it takes everybody to make a community, so he took pictures of everybody. That came back to me, when I didn't put much into it at the time. Boy, the voice came back, because I'm looking at this picture of a guy over at the Sierra Sporting Goods with this great big old fish. Here is a picture of this other gal that has those geese and she's proud as all get-out. She has one of them—holding them by the neck—and a shotgun in the other hand. She had come into the studio to have her picture taken.

My dad got pictures inside courtrooms, furniture stores, shoe stores, and the front doors of these places. It really showed a complete community. Everybody was important. At one time or another, you really needed that mailman or you needed to get a new pair of shoes. The service...you'll hear this from every old guy talking or older woman talking about the service that was rendered, like in a shoe store. They really made darn good and sure that they were selling you something that was going to last and that fit, and you had the same kind of service at a service station or a grocery store.

If anything went wrong, by gosh, they made it good, and that was just the way it was. Now they've come back old-time service with the people that are advertising that now. They don't have a clue what old-time service is. They weren't there, they didn't receive it, and they've certainly never rendered it. It was a whole different world. It started off as a part of competition, but it was a good thing to do

as far as being a friend and a neighbor in the community.

Do you remember any other local artists who were around at the time?

Oh, there were all kinds of people that were around at the time. Lou Hymers, was famous for doing caricatures and he did the Man About Town. You've seen some of his work, I'm quite sure. He did all kinds of work for match covers and for postcards. When Mella Harmon does her divorce postcard show and she talks about the divorce industry, a whole lot of the fun ones were all created by Lou Hymers. You can tell his work at a flash.

I always mispronounce Robert Caples' last name I say "Cay-bles" instead of "Caples." At any case, you want to get that right; he was another one that just did beautiful work. Some of the murals that are over there at the courthouse were done by him, and there are just wonderful things that he produced. Will James was in the area. That's going way, way back. He was a Western artist that was the same caliber as Russell and Remington. With Charles Mapes, Sr., he did the 1919 rodeo program cover.

You had these talented people that would float in and out. Some of them stayed; other ones didn't. You had people that would come in, like the old...where [unclear] Two is now, that was originally the Circle RB, and next door to it was the El Ruth, and now it is called Tombstone Motel. Those were originally named after a gal by the name of Ruth Browne, and her stage name was Reno Browne. She was married to Lash LaRue, who was an "A" movie star in Westerns. She was the female equivalent of the lead hero.

My mom did her painting with her horse. The outside of the frame was done in that heavy rope. It's really neat. I saw it here about

two years ago in an antique store. They wanted \$1,500 for it, and it's another big one, but I've got a big one out there in the garage. My walls are pretty much loaded here.

It was fun, too, because when we got into entertainment, the entertainers had nowhere to go to buy whatever they needed except really...they would socialize with you downtown. I tell different stories. My friend Frank Phoenix and I got out of a double feature over at the Majestic. At the time, of course, they had the newsreels, multiple cartoons, and the whole works, so it was about seven o'clock at night by the time we got out of there. The Majestic Sweet Shop was closed, and we wanted to go have a soda. We wound up going over to the Mapes, in their coffee counter, because they had the best root beer floats in town.

So we would just get our root beer floats. It was the production and the way it was served, with these ice-cold mugs and the big froth on the top. They were really pretty, plus they were darn good. Anyway, they were just served, and this old boy comes up and sits next to me. He looks and he says, "My lord, what do you got there?"

I said, "Root beer floats. They make the best ones in town."

He says, "Well, I might just have myself one of those." So he orders one and we sit there.

We're finishing ours, and I get up to go and say, "You are Andy Griffith, aren't you?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "I loved you in *Onionhead*," and we walked out. You ran across people like that all the time.

When I worked for my dad over at KNEV, I was just absolutely terrible on the air. He would have people come in that were performing, and one of the first people that came in was an accordion player by the name

of Dick Contino. He was really popular until the Korean War. He was a conscientious objector and his career pretty much stepped down about two levels.

At any case, he was performing at one of the clubs, and my dad said, "I've written down these short little sentences that you can't possibly screw up." How long are you going to be in town? What do you think of the area? I mean, these were short, concise, and right to the point.

Well, Dick Contino comes in, and I'm just as nervous as nervous could be. I don't know why. Maybe it was because I had the microphones, and the tape going like you've got here, and I was trying to monitor. Why, I've got to read these sentences to this guy and make it sound like I care. He picked right up on this. He said, "Let's go through it a couple of times and settle you down, because there is nothing to this." So we did. We went back and forth, back and forth.

Finally he said, "You're all set. Just turn on the machine, ask me the same things." So we did and it worked out great. So I felt pretty good; now I can do this.

A few weeks later, I had another fellow come in by the name of Frankie Finelli. He sang in the background of *Sound of Music*. He was the same way. He was a local fellow that had quite a few kids. He had one that was severely mentally handicapped and he just loved on that kid. I thought that was the neatest thing ever, because you could just see the love coming from this guy. It was just neat. I remember that very clearly.

At any case, he was the same thing. I thought I had got past the nerves, but I didn't. He said, "Let's just go through it once." That was all it took and then we were back on point, and so away we go.

Another two or three months before I was asked to be on the board while somebody

else is coming in, and it's Jerry Lewis. I was excited because I had seen all of his movies... just wonderful, with Dean Martin. He and his manager come in, both three sheets to the wind and just as foul-mouth, nasty, crude, and rude. This was the most miserable character I have ever been around.

I have maybe fifteen minutes of his garbage. "You piece of garbage that. Your two-bit town this. Your whatever the heck it is." He got the manager jumping in, and finally, he said to me, "Well, what do you and your two-bit station think of that?"

I got up and I walked over to the tape recorders that were vertically mounted. I took off the two rubber holders that held the dispensing reel and the take-up reel. I set those down and I took the reels off of there. I walked over right in front of him and dropped them in the garbage can and I said, "Not much."

They got in a big huff and left. There wasn't anything on that that could be used, and my dad thought that was pretty funny because he knew it was going to happen. [laughs]

I guess it was only three or four weeks later, that he said, "Don Rickles is coming in. I want you to do him." I am still ticked from being disappointed by Lewis, so when Don Rickles comes in, I'm ready to do battle. I've all but got my fists clenched. He turned out to be the biggest sweetheart you ever met in your life. He was just like Dick Contino and Frank Vinelli. He sent me Christmas cards for the next ten to fifteen years at KNEV. He asked about anything and everything, and he was the nicest man I think I ever met, and I was ready to do battle with him. [laughs]

You just never know what they are on the screen when they're performing and who they are in person. Some of them are just super surprise delights and other ones are...well, there's other ones. It's fun stuff, isn't it?

I've heard that about Jerry Lewis, though, that he's just an unpleasant...

Yes, "unpleasant" is really cutting him a lot of slack. [laughs]

At what point in your life were you working for your dad?

And this was early 1960s, during high school, just after I got out of the service.

What was downtown Reno like while Modern Photo was there and while you growing up? How has it changed over the years?

Well, it has changed big time. How many drugstores do you think we have in Reno right now, downtown Reno? We had one on three of the four corners of Second and Virginia Street. You had Scheel's, Ramos, and Walgreen's. If you looked down the other direction, then you had Ramos Drug and Hales Drugs. We had a multitude of them down there—Canon's and the whole works. You could get anything that you wanted.

Some of them carried a little different merchandise. Canon's up there on Commercial Row they would maybe have a larger liquor selection. [laughs] Every one of them seemed to have a way to...if they didn't have a soda fountain themselves, like down at Wilson's, they had something that would suffice, like the Scheel's Drug. Later on that was on the southeast corner of Second and Virginia Street. They had the first dispensing machine for pop, where they had the cups separate instead of buying bottled. Well, they had this, and you could really fill this thing up like you wanted it. That was just right inside the front door, so there was plenty of action there, but you don't have the drugstores now.

Of course, we had multiple men's and women's stores. We had the motion-picture houses over on Center Street. You had the Reno Theater then at First and Center Street. You had the Majestic over on First, the Granada Theater and the Nevada Theater, which wound up being the Crest, over on Second Street. The Tower Theater down on South Virginia Street. If you didn't want any of those, there was the Sparks Theater. Lots of us used to go over to the Sparks Theater too. It was fun. You had two drive-in theaters that were very popular: the El Rancho and the Midway. Of course, then you're driving out of the downtown core.

There wasn't anything that you would find in a full-blown, huge mall, like the Mall of America, that we didn't have in downtown Reno. We had the furniture stores. We had saddle makers and assayers. Anything and everything that was part of a legitimate business was downtown.

You had the Red Line section, of course. The casinos were restricted there, but that was full-blown gaming. All around that was your regular town, and we had everything: Sears and Roebuck, Montgomery Ward's, the National Dollar Store, the Federal Department Store, and Parker's Western Wear. Parker's was the only place to really buy Levis. They had the Sears version of it, just like when we used to go to Oden's. That is where you bought Schwinn. Well, if you went to Sears, it would have been a different brand completely—their brand—like the old Hawthorne's. It was all there, though, and you went downtown to go shopping.

Can you tell me about the photo collection you found, how it came to you, and what it documented?

Well, unfortunately, I had to lose both parents to get the entire collection together.

My mom passed away in 1985. I had paid off the house. I guess it was about 1956 or 1957, that she had put me on joint tenant rights of survivorship because I actually paid for the house. The house was mine when we lost Mom.

Well, back in her studio, behind all of the other stuff, there were four or five boxes of these great old Reno photos, photos of people that were friends of theirs and ours as a family, people that had worked for us, and all kinds of great shots of rodeo stuff that was not used. That was comical, because Mom went out there and took a bunch of rodeo shots and had them all over the front of Modern Photo. They were great action shots with this poor guy underneath the bottom of this bull, with dust flying.

Well, the cowboys would have been your customers, and they don't want a picture of them getting their brains kicked out; they want one where they're in charge. Mom didn't have any of those. Here were these photos and all kinds of great stuff was in there. There were different photos of people that she had done paintings on. Then, of course, she had the nice downtown shots from when she had to fill in for one of the camera girls and had made doubles. Like I had mentioned before, my dad had told me that it takes everybody to form a community and have a complete community, and here was all of these shots of places that I had forgotten about. I had hoped that I would have been a little bit sharper when I had access to all of the cameras and all the film. I didn't take any of these pictures, and in my forties I said, "God, I wish I had a shot of the Spudnut Donut Shop or the Hale's Drug counter." I didn't have them; I didn't take them. I didn't want anything to do with photography.

I actually had to work when I wanted to be out playing. Now, as you age, things become

important, and to go through that first box of stuff from my mom's, it was all coming back. When I lost my dad ten months later, here was another eight to ten boxes of all kinds of stuff he would have taken. He took action shots, other than the rodeo stuff that I talked about. All my mom's were stills. For any of the action shots, it was fires or the aerials that my dad took. Mom wasn't allowed to do that. She wasn't in a position to take chances.

My dad would take a chance. He was up there flying around the City of San Francisco, taking pictures of it when it was stuck on the mountain in 1952. Of course, when they got back to Reno, there was the FAA waiting for them to really give them what's for. All those pictures were the ones used in the *San Francisco Examiner*, though, to go ahead and account for all of this.

Here were all of these other different types of shots, but they all go together to form a complete collection. He took pictures of all kinds of things that didn't interest Mom, and Mom took pictures of all kinds of things that didn't interest Dad. There was the complete community. It was great. I had all of these boxes of things.

I had one bad experience. I went ahead with a fellow that was one of the Sands owners...here was a photo of his dad. I got him on the phone and said, "Hey, I got this photo on there."

"Oh, god, I'd love to have that." I had his all-around person, Mickie, a real nice little gal...she ran invoices back and forth in the pickup and did whatever had to be done. She worked out of maintenance running parts and the rest of it—whatever it took to be a good runner—but she had a lot of skills up topside to make sure that everything was signed, sealed, and delivered properly.

He asked me, "Could I just send Mickie up to get that box?"

I said, "Well, anything that pertains to your family, go ahead and take. Everything else I want returned to me."

"Okay, no problem."

About three weeks later, I call him, and he said, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about," and hangs up on me.

I called Mickie, and Mickie said, "I can't talk on this phone." She called me that night at home and said they had her go up to the Historical Society and donate those in this man's name and get a receipt for his tax write-off purposes. That son of a...I was hot.

It was three or four months later that I got a call from Eric Moody over at the Historical Society. He said, "Mr. Cobb, we have this wonderful donation and it's marked Modern Photo all over it. We have tracked down that this was your family's store, and we thought maybe you could help us identify it."

I said, "I'll tell you what, Mr. Moody. There is only one way in the world that I would ever help, and that is to go ahead and straighten out who had authority to donate what to you."

He said, "What do you mean?" So I told him what had happened.

He said, "Oh, my god."

I got a little enticement, though. I said, "If you want to work with me, I've got fourteen or fifteen other boxes."

He said, "You do?"

I said, "Yes, I do, but you're not going to see them..." Eric wanted to see if he could at least see what I had. So I invited him over and I showed him these things.

He said, "Mr. Cobb—"

I said, "You can call me Mr. Cobb one more time. My name's Neal."

He said, "Neal, what can we do to make you happy so that we could possibly be caretakers of this collection? Out here in this shed isn't the ideal place for them."

I said, "You have to get that person's name off of my family's creations."

He said, "Let me work on it."

I got a call not very much longer, about two or three weeks, and he said, "I've got it taken care of. The representative from the Sands has now been reduced to the delivery. Everything is the Cobb Collection. Could we please help you process what you have?"

So we started taking the boxes of stuff over. I was going through them myself, trying to label what I could remember and put them in glassines. They would normally have an intern that would be working with me. After we got a lot of that done and got it organized like I liked it, which wasn't the way that they did it...it has since been changed, of course, because everything had to have accession numbers and the rest of it. Once they have it on their property, they're responsible for it, even though this collection is on a permanent loan, which is the way it is written out. If I'm unhappy with them, I give them fair warning and I can pull everything out of there. Upon my demise, if everything has run great until that point, it converts to an out-and-out gift. This all happened in 1988, so we go back quite a ways. There has been other people that have worked on them. Jean Davis worked on that thing three or four years and she still had a bunch more work to do. It is a rather extensive collection.

Of course, I've been able to add to it with the transfer of treasures from one individual to another. What I mean by that is a person like Art Long, who had given me photos that he created when he worked for the Chamber of Commerce, these photos were done by him, not Modern Photo. We have a category that says "Art Long." It is the same way with Elaine Fairchild, Elmo Beeks, Iola Smith, and Ione Metcalf.

The important part of all of this is that these people are as important as the photographs themselves. They're the people that were there firsthand and witnessed this, and had enough sense to take the picture. I always liked the example of Elaine Fairchild. She was there September 19, 1927, at Blanchfield Field taking photos of Lindbergh landing Spirit of St. Louis, and those photos have been utilized in the Reno Air Race program. These are important and they can come back out. They are area treasures, but somebody had to create them. Those people, we just can't lose them in the shuffle. I just don't allow it to happen.

I've been honored that people will trust me with these things. They say, "Well, I don't have anybody else." If I'm the last resort, I'm pretty darned pleased to do that. There is a tag on everything, things from Don Dondaro and George Kerr, and it goes on and on.

Modern Photo was only in business from 1940 as a full-blown shop. It was freelance until 1940 out of the house, the same way as my dad worked for KOH and the rest of that. He wasn't paid like he was back East where he was a big shot. Moving out here was another part of trying to keep the family together, because he got altogether too much attention. Too many ladies. It was too fast of a track, and to preserve the family, he had to make changes.

So in any case, I've got these photos. There are exceptions; I fell heir to all of the stuff, as just an administrator, for Melba Hand. Her family goes directly back to the Frey Ranch. We've kept everything together. It has been inventoried and I get the paperwork back to the heirs there, but they didn't know exactly what to do with it. There was instructions from Melba that said, "You make sure Neal Cobb gets these things. He knows what to do with them."

There were limited instructions that went with it, like the clothes really should be separated. There has to be that name connection between the Carson City museum that has most of the clothes, because they go all the way back to the 1860s. How do you handle these, preserve them, and tie them to local history when they're displayed? The ladies during World War II were in the Marines and the Navy and so on. All of the uniforms...everything was there. It was great with the downtown photographs and the family ties to these ranches.

The Frey and the "Fry," was interesting... Melba Hand explained to me one time that it depends on what side of the family you're on whether you're German or French. It was "Fry" if you're from the German part. It was a little harsher. It was Frey if you're...at any case, they were all related. They wound up here in Nevada with different ranches.

There is a full binder that is just all about the Frey Ranch that was out there south of town. It was a working ranch, and so the pictures show all of the shearing of the sheep, all the outbuildings, the main building, and the barns. The whole works is there, so this is great Nevada stuff, but those photos strictly under Melba Hand. That's who made it possible. Those were just instructions to me.

So, I try to do the best job that I possibly can and work as an in-between. I have the First Congregational Church who ran across their original books. They've been here since 1871. They have the records going all the way back to 1871, and they didn't quite know what to do with them. I get a call from Mike Smith who said, "Neal, we really need to safeguard these things. What do you think?"

I said, "I know exactly what we need to do. I need to get you tied in with Sheryl Zorn, who is the director now at the Historical

Society. She needs to see these and we need to go ahead and get a permanent loan like I have." The Trinity Church has a loan that's set up with the Historical Society.

You have from the Indian colony all kinds of...where these are stored, but the Historical Society is responsible for them. Even though they own them and they can cancel the agreement, they have to check in and [check their items] out to fool with them. When you get people that are working with genealogy, church records are absolutely wonderful. Sheryl's excited about the opportunity, and the folks over at the First Congregational Church are excited about it. It's good to act as an in-between.

I know that you've been named an honorary curator at the Historical Society.

I take a lot of pride in that. In fact, I had just gotten that award. They brought in the whole staff. They had a cake and the whole works there. They made a big deal out of it because there is only one honorary curator. Now, it's just a title—that is all it is—but it's supposed to represent all of the work that I've done for the Historical Society, the opportunity to utilize my collection, and all of the things that I've been able to get donated to the Historical Society.

Leonard Blumstrom had that great desk arrangement and file thing from the post office. He worked for the post office when the new one opened down there in 1934, up until the time he retired. When they remodeled a lot of things, they pulled all the oak furniture out of there. They had it in a shed, and I spotted that thing and said, "We've got to get this somewhere where it belongs." I raised enough Cain at the Historical Society that I got my way and was able to pick it up and get

it over there. I got them a nice copier machine one time and about eight or ten boxes of toner. That was worth more than the machine was. [laughs] It just goes on and on with the things that you can do there.

I got this badge. They made it a special thing to give me this badge. I'm the fellow that goes out, and when I do a program I'm representing the Historical Society. I always make note of that and I like to do that. I'm proud of the fact but I want you to go up there and see the Historical Society. All of these things are up there and there is a lot more than just my collection. There is a huge amount of things, like the Dat So La Lee baskets. You have to see these things firsthand, and they're there, so you have to get up there and do that.

Anyway, I did this program. I'm wearing my badge on my sport jacket, and when we left, I forgot the sport jacket. I went back—it hadn't been an hour—to go pick it up and somebody had walked with it. I was more upset about losing my nametag that they went to all the trouble to make up for me. I was real upset about that. My wife says, "Well, what about your jacket?" I was more upset about this thing.

I take a lot of pride in that, and we have fun with this radio and TV program that we do. I'm introduced as one of the panel as the honorary curator from the Nevada State Historical Society. I say, "Yes, and some day we're going to explain what in the world that is." I'm going to have Sheryl Zorn come down and cover it because I might be looking at it through rose-colored glasses and she can really put some.... These are all my friends up at the Historical Society. I am honored that I've got full run of the facility and am trusted around these things that are so incredibly valuable. It doesn't get any better than that. I'm a proud honorary curator.

Can you tell me about people who have used your photo collection and the uses of those photos?

Anytime something comes up with the city where they're going to demo a building, or there's a question about tearing a building down, the newspaper and the television people are all over us. We had lots of coverage on the Riverside when they thought it was going to go we were wrong on that one. That is the one we were worried about. We thought it was a shoo-in to save the Mapes, but we had it backwards.

The Virginia Street Bridge was the same kind of a thing. When things came up with the City of San Francisco being stuck up in the hills, I had stuff coming from San Francisco. They didn't keep any of that stuff and it has their name on it. It was the City of San Francisco train.

There are those outlets, and there are people that are doing research or people putting together books. I was able and very proud to be able to help Patti Cafferetta on all of her books, including the original that came out with a Reno Chamber of Commerce promotional.... It was a Norm Nielson book.

Well, of all of the 1940s photos, you're going to find three-fourths to seven-eighths of those are photos out of my collection. You get into Guy Clifton's books and you see my photos all through there. It is the same way with Dwayne Kling's book, and with the oral history that we did on Harolds Club, *A Family Affair*. If I pull all of the books out, the photos have probably been used in between twenty and twenty-five books, plus all of this television coverage and the rest of it.

Of course, I wind up with my name attached to project, and people ask, "Well, you were here when they were running the El Rancho Drive-

in. What do you think about when they initially closed it?" Now they've got it back open. We talked about being the kids that utilized the drive-in, sneaking in that thing with a whole trunkful of kids and then not letting them out.

It's amazing that I have someone like Phillip Earl, who, anytime I have a question, I ask him. He will say, "Well, I did an article on it. Here." He wrote articles for I don't know how many years. Even with Alicia Barber, the original program she put together on the Virginia Street Bridge, helped other people who are going to use this to get the history of the area out. There are always individuals that we'll meet, like the Bell Telephone. When they did Re-track, they wanted to prove the simple fact that they had their poles down there before any of the rest of this. There was some advantage to being the first ones there and having rights to that.

Of course, I had a nice shot out of the Plaza Hotel that showed all the way down east. It showed all of Commercial Row, all of the tracks, and the original dispatcher's assembly that was there above track level so they could watch for trains coming in and out and make sure that you weren't going to have any safety problems.

We've had quite a few requests for documentation for the Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries fight. Those photos weren't taken by Modern Photo, but I've been able to fall heir to...some of this stuff was in Modern Photo's archives, but it was there for some other reason. Where my folks got them or why they were there...somebody dropped them off and they didn't pick them up, or whatever the circumstances were, they were in the boxes. So we had some pretty decent stuff on Johnson and Jeffries, and you can add to that.

Anytime that you're going to have construction where a gas station was, where

you would have had pipes and the pits...so a huge amount. Reno Ironworks wanted to be able to buy the property and move out to where Patagonia and Budweiser is. They wound up on Parr Boulevard. What they needed was a shot of Tahoe Timber, which was a lumber processing mill. They used a whole lot of different materials and had tanks for fuels. For EPA studies, when they take over properties, they need to see what was there. I had a nice aerial shot of it my dad took one day, just while up flying around.

I started to tell you about Phillip Earl. I get all kinds of information from him. Most likely, he has done an article on it, and he does his research, so you study it. You're getting some pretty darn accurate information when you do that. Every so often he'll come to me and say, "I've got this photograph. Can you tell me or do you have any idea where this is taken?"

One time I said, "Yes, that's Third Street looking west, but you're not showing the railroad tracks. You're just showing the fronts of the houses. That would go from Ralston over to Keystone and Peavine."

He said, "How in the world would you know that?"

I said, "Well, that's Micky Woosley's house there. He was in the third grade with me."

He said, "Even from this angle you can tell that?"

And I said, "Yes, you could see it perfectly off the roof of the El Cortez."

He said, "What were you doing up on the roof of the El Cortez?"

We knew how to commandeer every elevator in town. We've been on every single solitary roof that there was. It was just a fun thing to see what was going on. We knew how to sneak into all of the swimming pools and all of the movie houses, so you get a different view of things. So an odd angle here that

doesn't mean anything to anybody else, I was there. I know exactly what it is.

Being a mean little kid or a mischievous little kid...I was not a mean kid, but I was mischievous, so when you do things like this, taking a chance and being places where you're not supposed to be, it actually paid off in later years. I wouldn't recommend that to other kids. I'm not saying that.

When Jerry and I did the book, we wanted to match a photo that my mom had taken in 1957 out of the same penthouse that Marilyn Monroe was in. It showed the beautiful Truckee River, the Episcopal Church over there in the distance, the Herman Wilson Chrysler dealership (which was where the Mills Lane court complex is now), and the Riverside Hotel. You could see down Virginia Street where Powning Park actually had trees in front of the State Building and so on. We wanted to be able to match that, so we went up in the tenth floor of the Darth Vader Building—the bank building, and we were trying to shoot out of the men's room.

Because the Mapes is gone, it is just the plaza, and I call it the Mapes Plaza. I don't care what the city of Reno people call it.

In any case, when we got up in the tenth floor (of what is now City Hall), in the restroom there, you had condensation in the windows. You had a reflection from this bright orange paint they used on the stalls and everything in there, and you had the sun hitting it from the outside. We couldn't get a clear shot to try and match that photo so we said, "Let's go a little higher."

We went up to the fourteenth floor and that didn't work. We got all the way up on the seventeenth floor and had the same problems. We're taking the elevator down, and there's only Jerry and I standing there. All four elevators hit at the same time, and this maintenance man walks around the corner

and he gets in one. So like a couple of sheep, we follow him. We're still complaining about not being able to get the shot and maybe not being able to use that one great photo that we've got, and he said, "Well, would you guys like to go up on the roof?"

"Stop the elevator. You betcha." We must have spent the next hour and a half up there, and since we had the opportunity to do that, we took 360-degree pictures, not just the one we needed. We took full advantage of the photo op. That was fun up there, and we were just lucky that he walked around the corner. Otherwise, it would have never happened.

Of course, the book you're talking about is the world's greatest book.

Reno Now and Then. We had the best time putting that together, and to work with the Oral History Program that actually funded it and made it a reality.... It's something that we're very proud of, and it is a simple fact when you have your name attached with something that is positive, it is a good thing. It's really a good thing.

How has finding this photo collection changed your life?

Oh, big time. There was the simple fact that I was upset that I didn't take full advantage when I could have, and I had somebody else take care of all of the things that I would have liked to have remembered myself. There were also all of these other things. To be able to put this collection together, meet the Historical Society group, work with Eric Moody and the rest of the staff over there, and to get into a different circle...these are my friends now. These are people that I know.

I spend a huge amount of time...other people that do these programs, like Tom

MaCaulay with the ice harvesting, which is a wonderful program that he puts on, or Jack Hursh with the barns....We can go on and on about this. I am able to be personal friends with Guy Rocha, the state historic archivist, Ron James, and Bob Nylea.

I did not realize how important and how fortunate I was at the same time. I had the opportunity to share not only Nevada pride and Reno pride, but to reminisce and bring back things that were sheer pleasure. We didn't know how fortunate we were growing up here. We thought that every place was like Reno, and it wasn't. We had a very special, tight-knit community and the pride was big-time.

We used to compete with Sparks. Sparks has a huge amount of pride, and so we competed with them. Unfortunately, Reno has lost that. Sparks hasn't. I reminisce. We did all kinds of things. From the Fenwick Paint Store, not Jerry, but his older sister, Yvonne, was able to get us all of the white paint to make a dollar sign out of the Sparks "S", which we did. Of course, they painted our "R" their colors. [laughs] It was fun.

Anytime you have a competition that is going to bring out pride, I always like to talk about Harrah's and Harolds Club. I worked for Harolds Club and I knew, bar none, we were the best casino in town. Well, the kids that worked just down the street a little bit at Harrah's knew darn well that they were the best club in town, and the competition between the two was extraordinary. We went completely out of our way to make sure that we took better care of our customers when we had them in-house, and so did they.

So, who won the contest? Neither one of us. The customers won. The city of Reno won. It was great because it was a contest of pride. You can go too far with pride and make it one of the seven sins like envy and so on, but a

certain amount of pride is a stand-up quality. It says who you are, just don't let it get out of hand.

That was always a great thing to reminisce with. To find appreciation is being able to work in the circles that you want or to be hugged by little old ladies when you take a program to a senior center. I was over at Classic Manor and I did a program, and there was this little gal that was all hunched over... she couldn't have been more than about four-foot-eight. Five-foot was way out of distance for her, and I'll bet she didn't weight eighty pounds. She gave me such a hug, she popped my back, and she thanked me with a tear in her eye. Life doesn't get a whole lot better than that. I mean, you're bringing something to people that really need to see something that is of value to them, and they connect directly to what I'm talking about.

So, to get all of the thank-yous...I've got a whole box of thank-yous. I've got so many of them that I can't display them. I have certain things on the wall that I showed you, and am very proud of them. Almost everything that I've been able to accomplish has been through my efforts to promote the history of this area, but not a whole lot before that. This was a life-changing thing for me because now I had something that didn't just connect to the family, but it connected with the whole area.

Now I'm constantly on the outlook for anything and everything else that I can obtain. I watch yard sales. I look for scrapbooks. You really get into this stuff. There was the flea market at Hot August Nights and this character had a whole stack of four-by-five negatives. He just set them out and the sun is beating down. I said, "You've got to put those in the shade. They won't take it."

He said, "You're so worried about them, why don't you buy them?" He was kind of a smart-aleck.

I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you..." I forget exactly. I think I offered him five or ten dollars for the whole box, and I got them. In there was a huge amount of great old Reno shots that, again, weren't taken by Modern Photo, but I own these things now. Who did produce them? I can't attach a name to them, but we can sure recognize the subject matter. We've done calendars. City of Reno had one of the shots that we had of the original arch as the cover. It's been just a huge amount of education. You learn things all the time.

I just did a program with Marty Smith over at the Flag Store for this *Tales of Nevada* program that we put on—this radio and TV thing—and we brought in the first Nevada flag. It was surprising to me that we didn't have a Nevada flag until 1905. The reason for that is after the Civil War you didn't want these labels that could be North or South, like Georgia or Tennessee. You don't want people fighting with each other.

What brought the flags back were women's groups that were pushing for the right to vote. They had contingencies where they would meet at a national meeting, and here was the group from Nevada with their handmade flag. It was the same way with California and Wyoming. It grew from there, and the first flag was part of that—the 1905 one. In 1915, they changed things around, but they made it too expensive to reproduce because it had so many colors.

In 1929, you had the flag that had Nevada with all the letters stretched out, and people had to go letter by letter. "Oh, it says Nevada." In 1991, Bill Raggio went ahead and had this so Nevada was all one piece in a reversed arch on the bottom part of the star. So there has only been four Nevada flags. I learned a whole bunch by just interviewing a guy whose game is flags. I talked with Bill Granada when I was looking at some of these foundry

shots, wondering where they were. He said, "Hey, you dummy, they only had one foundry around here. That was the Sparks railroad yard." The more we got into things, you could see parts of the roundhouse where they were working on the inside, and everything tied together. So here was a man, and that was his business. He knew. You have to talk to the right person.

I did a presentation for the Newcomers, and I had a gentleman come up and talk to me afterwards. He said, "Mr. Cobb, I just love the program, but I'm not a new person. I came with my friend that is a neighbor. I just heard him talking about it and I wanted to see your program. It was just excellent, but you made one little error. When you showed the shot of Lee's Drive-In and where it was on the southwest corner of Fourth and Sierra Street, right across the street from Ross & Burke Mortuary...that was a good spot. You mentioned it was placed strategically to take full advantage of the tourist action. You have to remember the town wasn't..." He got as far as s-e; the word was going to be "seasonal". You had to take care of your bread-and-butter customers. That is the residents. That is the nine months that keeps you alive so that you can get to the gravy part with an excess of people. He said, "By the way, it was set up like this to accommodate them. I didn't introduce myself. My name's Hudson Lee. I built the place." It was Lee's Drive-In. So I was getting it right from the horse's mouth.

You talk to people like Ben Ackert—Ben Ackert with the Ben's Discount Liquor—and how he started off. We have pictures of him down there sandbagging during the 1950 Reno flood, and we've utilized those photos for books. It's just been one connection after another.

I had the telephone ring and I had somebody on there that said, "You know, I've

got these photos and I don't quite know what to do with them. Is there any chance you could look at them and tell me what they are?" I do that all the time, and they're just grateful as all get-out. They wind up framing these things and they've got the history. They pass the history on to their siblings. What you've actually accomplished is you've done your part in extending and promoting history itself.

I was invited to do a program for a group of teachers that were starting off with city history and then expanding out. They wanted to work that into the curriculum of the third to the eighth grade. They asked me to bring one book that I would recommend for reference.

When I showed up, I had five books and I said, "This is not because I'm stupid, and don't know the difference between one and five. It's because each one of these has a different accounting of a very important historical event in Reno's history. In the position that you're in, you need to make sure that you don't extend a falsehood, because there is big-time misinformation. I strongly recommend that you read at least two of these, and when you see how they don't agree with each other, you go to the Historical Society, you call up some of the experts, and you find out."

I said, "I'll give you an example here. Really, I'd like you to read three books. Fanatics like myself, we've read all of them and we can tear these things apart. That's not really our job. Our job is to make sure that the best story is the real story. An example is this book here." I held up one. "This book says it was forty acres that Myron Lake, the generous soul that he was, donated to the Crocker brothers to bring the Central Pacific Railroad here." I held up another one, "This one says eighty acres. This one says one hundred and twenty. I got one that says a hundred and sixty acres, and this last one says four hundred acres."

There are all of these teachers with their hands up, which I thought was rather strange, because normally I'm the guy with my hand up. Of course, I know exactly what they want to know. I said, "Well, what one is right? Well, it was a hundred and sixty acres cut up into four hundred lots minus your 15 percent inner structure for streets, sidewalks, and so on."

I said, "Two hundred dollars in gold coin had to pass hands from the Crocker brothers to Myron Lake. He had a reserve on every eighth piece of property. The exemptions that were kept completely out of it were all four corners of the bridge. Any and all of the costs of putting on the auction with all of these lots for the sale being held May 9, 1868 would be borne by Central Pacific Railroad. That means the surveying, the advertising, the conducting of the auction—the whole works. That's the real story."

This one fellow asked, "Well, how can you be so sure?"

I said, "Well, I've got a friend that maybe some of these other authors didn't have." At the time, I didn't say "authors" because we hadn't done the book yet. "I have a friend that just happens to be the state archivist and I've looked at *the* paperwork, the *real* paperwork, and that's what it says. Anybody else that has made these mistakes either were misinformed by somebody else they thought really knew, they didn't have access to what I did and they made up their own figures, like that four-hundred-acre one, or they're just lazy. But you're the people that are in charge of the young minds now. It is imperative that you get it right. Please don't teach anything until you have it right."

I thought maybe I ticked some of them off, but it was only a couple of weeks later that they invited me back to present to a whole other group of teachers—another sixty or

seventy teachers. It was really worth making the separation and telling these folks how important they are at this particular time in those kids' lives because they are the source of authority.

Newspapers ask me, "Well, do you get most everything out of newspapers?" What you can count on is, if it was paid classified, then it had to be right. Otherwise, they didn't get their money, or it's laced with opinion. The papers are notorious. They have been that way since the beginning of time. If you want the real story, double-check and go from different sources. If everybody agrees, then, hot dog, we're in.

Can you tell me what the Historical Resources Commission is and what it does?

It is like all of the other city commissions. It is an advisory group, and when the city has questions or they need recommendations on what would work well in a neighborhood... you'll have different projects that would include cell towers and so on, [and the city needs to know if] this is going to affect any particular neighborhood more than it would the other, should it be supported, and if we have concerns about it. There were different projects that we did have concerns about.

We also were able to have multiple projects brought before us for our review before they got out to the general public. Even though it was a public meeting, we had very few people that ever were part of an audience on this. This was a little dry as far as any of the commissions were concerned. You didn't have the hot issues like in a neighborhood, with a couple of exceptions. When they were going to tear down the Fleischmann Planetarium, people went right to a city board that had "historic" in their title. We had a jam-packed session down there, and we had news coverage and the

whole works, which we believe really helped save it. That was an outcry that started through that commission, with a recommendation from the board that you do everything that you possibly can because of the uniqueness and the importance of the building itself, like looking for other alternatives. Everything comes in the form of suggestions, though. So you have to stop there.

There were other things that we were very active with. We had award ceremonies and we had the distinguished advocate. Tom King, working with the Oral History Program on the book that we had put together, I was able to get him that award. I was the sponsor on that, and was able to bring in the background.

[unclear] up at the university was another one—one of the other members. I'm not sure exactly who brought that in. Then you have advocates. I was responsible for getting the award for Carl Breckenridge and one for Dick Stoddard, and there was a couple of other people.

There are individuals that had commercial property they were able to restore and reuse in one way or the other, and there was multiple awards on that. There was also an award for structures, like the Virginia Street Bridge or something like it that wasn't necessarily something that the general public shopped in or had lights that turned on.

Then the last award and I believe the most important, was the residential award. I was very active in that because I had talked with many people. 901 Ralston comes to mind right now, which was wiped out by a pilot in 1924 by the name of Blanchfield. He was flying one of the U.S. Mail Service aircrafts. They were honoring a fallen mechanic, and everybody liked him. They drew straws and he won.

Well, as they're going around the "Lou Berrum" Knights of Pythias Cemetery up

there at Tenth and Ralston—part of their ceremony was to make the three circles around the activities down below and during the last circle throw out the black wreath—he caught a downdraft or something and slammed right into 901 Ralston. He was killed. What resulted from that is they named the field out there. It's part of a golf course now. Instead of just the Reno stop on the airmail service, it wound up being Blanchfield Field. It got a little confusing for a lot of people, since there is two fields [in the name] and there is part of his name now.

After that 901 Ralston was destroyed. That was somebody's house. It was entertained on the floor of the United States Congress who holds responsibility for it, and they assumed responsibility. The federal government was to rebuild 901 Ralston as it sits right now. We were able to get the award for that.

1379 Ridgeway Court is a very unique structure with turrets and all of this. One of them belongs to Joan Arrizabalaga. That's 937 Joan Street—a wonderful Queen Anne.

There are many structures like that, that year after year we were able to get the designations out there for and get them awarded in front of the City Council by one of the members, most likely the liaison from the City Council themselves. Toni Harsh had done that for two or three times. Dan Gustin's been very good with it also.

What is the award that you're going to receive from the commission?

There's only going to be one this year, and I believe that's part of cutbacks, but I'm very pleased that I'm going to get the Distinguished Service 2011 Historic Preservation Award. That is the biggie. You hate to sit here and brag about yourself, but I'm very proud that I was selected for that, and pleased.

You get out there and you try and talk to people. You take programs to all these organizations, and it's an all-out effort to really bring light to the valuable history that we have here. I preach all the time—and you've heard me say this before—that the foundation to any community is its history. This is what you build on. If you forget what you're building on, you'll just turn into a house of cards rather than anything that has any substance. That's what I believe, and I think that history itself has proven that you really should not lose contact with who and what you are.

When are you due to actually receive that award?

From what Cindy Ainsworth said to me, it's the twenty-fourth of August. We'll just see if it materializes or not. I like the idea that I've had people go to bat for me. Whatever the politics are down there in City Hall, whether I get a plaque in my hand or not, I'm just tickled to death that I've got people like Cindy Ainsworth that think that I'm of value. [This did happen on August 24, 2011].

How did you first become involved in the commission?

I was the chair of the West University Neighborhood NAB, and they found out that I was very active and I knew a lot more than a lot of people about history. When I was approached by, believe it or not, Dave Aiazzi and one of the other Council people. They say, "Hey, you got to have Cobb on there. He knows more about the history of the area than anybody else we know." A lot of people probably know more, but they didn't know them; they knew me. It was their appointment, and they asked me, "Would you back off of the West University NAB and take the appointment there?"

I was on that commission for in between ten and eleven years. You're only supposed to serve two four-year terms, so I snuck by another two and a half to three years on it. We've had many wonderful and very dedicated members. Red Kittell, Mella Harmon, Sally Ramm, Dave Hollecker—it just goes on and on. These are people that care. They get out there and they have some fun with it. A person that you might know, Alicia Barber, was a very valuable member of the Historic Resources Commission.

We found out with a project that we were not supposed to be proactive except for what our charge was, and that was with this award thing. That was up to us, and we did a lot of documentation, field trips, taking photographs, and archiving. We produced a walking map of Reno that included all the historic stops. Well, not all of them, but as many as we could get into the folder.

We had a budget at one time, if you can believe that or not. That has since gone. These are more difficult economic times, so they're cutting back on the office staff that records meeting, instead of every month to every other month, as far as meetings. To have any discretionary funds, that was something else.

We were able to mark the Powning Addition and go through the process of selecting the type of signs and getting everybody to agree on what was the original Powning section. Of course, that was Second Street down to Riverside Drive and Keystone over to Arlington—everything within that area. There are real nice signposts down there, now.

I think Felvia Belaustegui, another member of the Historical Resources Commission, she is actively putting together and has quite a bit of the dollars and the pledges to go ahead and put one of the stone markers that say "You're now entering..." like they have up in

the Newlands area. We're hoping that comes to be.

We found out that we couldn't be as proactive as we needed, though, and that all revolved around the WCTU fountain that we were able to successfully restore and have installed at track level at the Amtrak station. Originally, we got permission through ourselves to ask the Park Department if we could assume responsibility for this fountain that sat in front of the California Building. It sat there from 1932 for the next seventy-five years. It was vandalized and all kinds of parts gone—the bottom base, the light stanchions, the horse trough, and the dog dish.

Dave Hollecker was the instigator on this. He came to me one day and he asked if I knew anything about that fountain out there, and I said, "Well, yes. It was a war memorial for the Spanish American War. I know that the Red Cross had something to do with the dollars contributed, for what reason I'm not sure."

We found all of that out later, and with the WTCU...this was the group that was against alcohol, period. They had this fountain built in 1908. It took them four years to go ahead and work out the designs and get the money to do it and have Nevada Engineering, which is one of the names where Martin Iron is now... it had multiple names earlier in its life.

They were able to build something of substance, and it was a beautiful thing. It had this title designed "To quench the thirst of all of God's creatures." That's why the horse trough was there. It sat there in between the railroad tracks and Plaza Street on Virginia Street. When they did a little straightening on Virginia Street, they moved it out to Idlewild Park, and then it was pretty much just forgotten.

Well, that's an important part of Reno's history, and Dave and I really went after it. We made an appearance over at the Park

Department, and they were glad to get rid of it. They gave it to us in a heartbeat. It was no problem. We were going to go out and get support from PEO, the Women's Heritage Group, and anybody else that we could dig up. I say dig up because you really have to put your imagination to use about who would be beneficial. Well, Bob Nyland would, so I got Bob Nyland, Guy Rocha, and all these people. I had Peter Banderagga up at the Historical Society at the time, and Eric Moody.

We're getting ready to go when we get this stern warning from the legal department, "You cannot be proactive." Dave and I decided that this was a worthwhile project, period. We had it going, [so we decided to] do this on our own. For the next three or four months, Historical Resources Commissions wanted an update on what we had been able to do, making sure that we were told each and every single, solitary time.... I finally blew my stack because we knew that we were not representing the Historical Resources Commission and were privateers. We were out here.

We wanted to get enough of the paperwork, and we had a whole stack of it, so when I went before the Reno City Council, I could say, "Hey, look it. This is what this thing is. It's a historical monument. It's Reno's history big time, and these are the people that happen to agree with me." I presented this whole stack of stuff from everyone. I didn't know there were so many PEO groups out there, but there are, and they were wonderful hosts.

We had put together a program that talked about the involvement of the Red Cross and the WCTU, and the involvement of the troops. We had the only mounted cavalry unit that ever left the United States and fought on horseback. They fought in the Philippines in 1898. They came from this area, trained in Carson, shipped over to San Francisco, and

were taken by ship over to the Philippines where they fought bravely.

This was great stuff to us. The fights that they got into...they were the women. They had to get past the powers that be, which were all male at the time. Fortunately, they were married to a couple of them and I guess behind closed doors they were able to make some progress. However what worked is immaterial, but they were able to fight the system and the way the social and legal community was run at the time. I mean, they didn't have the right to vote until 1914, which was five years before the rest of the country. Then we had to find out who was the first one [to allow women to vote]. Dave and I have curious minds. It was Wyoming, all the way back to 1896. Isn't that good stuff?

So, the fountain was a very well-built plate steel. The sign is just beautiful, and it is still with us. To be able to be part of saving something like this...we still gave full reports because it had initially started at the Historical Resources Commission, and when we had success...I'd better back up a little bit. We raised \$5,700 and we had more coming. When Dan Gustin made an appearance over at the Historical Resources Commission meeting, he said, "Neal, I've got to talk to you first, you and Dave. Then I'm going to lay it on the rest of the group."

I said, "Well, what's that?"

He said, "There is a component on ReTRAC that the demands that a percentage of the monies to build that go to arts and history. This is absolutely perfect. It's part of the area. It was just sitting..." They probably expanded where it originally sat. In any case, he said, "I'm going to run this through and we're going to get this thing done." He was able to do that.

Then it came full circle. Then you had it coming through the City Council people.

After he got permission there, it came back to Historical Resources for any of the reviews. We had to get permission, but everybody was supportive of this and active.

The only thing that ever ticked me off is they treated me like a numbskull. I said, "We know that we can't represent the commission, because we can't be proactive. You do not have to tell me that again. If you do, I'm going to just throw a real tizzy, and you don't want to see it because I'll embarrass you and myself. We're tired of hearing it. It almost sounds like the beginning of *Mission Impossible*. 'Well, Mr. Phelps, we'll disavow any knowledge of your existence.' Don't treat us like that. We're out doing a good thing." Then we were able to have some real fun, though.

This is great. They can't do anything to us about it, so Dave and I went ahead with the monies that we had, and without going through the red tape, we surrounded the whole area with time-appropriate photographs, all of the early train stations, to the addition that is on there. That addition came before the Historical Resources Commission. It was really supported because it didn't try and compete. It really complemented the 1925 structure.

So in any case, we got all these pictures, and had them blown up. We got a storyboard to put it up to give all of the history, and we paid for it to be out of there. To keep people out of the horse trough, we bought bulletproof glass that simulated water, but it kept numbskulls out of the horse trough. We had all of these photographs and posters. We went back and we did some more. We made sure we spent every nickel that we had. In fact, we had to each chip in twenty bucks at the end of it because we had eliminated everything in what we had bought after that on having a couple posters framed.

We had them all installed, and when we had the grand opening on it, everybody said, "Wow! Is this neat." They're looking at the pictures and all of this stuff going on. It's just a complete production. The fun part is we didn't ask the City of Reno for permission. We didn't ask the Southern Pacific for permission. The City of Reno thinks that Southern Pacific did it, and what a great thing they did, and Southern Pacific thinks the City of Reno did it, and what a great thing they did. They had no idea that Dave Hollecker and Neal Cobb went ahead and spent the rest of the money that they had raised to make this a complete project.

And it's beautiful; it really is. Even the extra little indicator that's with all the war memorials is across the street from the Courthouse. It gives directions to where this is located, what it is, and that it is worth seeing. It is a real nice pedestal. The Park Department put it together for us. We had it constructed. Little things like that—seven to eight hundred dollars here or a thousand over there...we went through that \$5,700, I'll tell you. [laughs] We did good with it, and we're very pleased.

Other things that happened with the Historical Resources Commission is that we were able to have different celebrations that went along with the awards. We were involved with other things, like throwing the rings off of the bridge. We tried getting a little extra support with the Historical Resources Commission. It was concerned about what was going to happen to some of these structures, like the Virginia Street Bridge. You have to hold your breath on them. My hopes are that they will be able to utilize the lights off of it and part of the railing, and then put something there that is not going to look like ugly.

That reminds me that I looked up different newspapers from 1903 and 1904. They wanted

a bridge that was aesthetically pleasing and to get rid of the 1877 bridge that looked like a utilitarian railroad bridge. They wanted to move it on down to Park Street, which is what happened. Of course, it washed away in the 1950 flood. They wanted something that really looked nice and that the city could be proud of, though.

Here you had the Masonic Temple on one corner. At the time you had the Carnegie Library, where the post office sits now, and the Riverside has been with us in many different forms over the years, going all the way back to 1868 and maybe a little before that. Then you had the 1908 post office. You had that historical corner—all four corners of the Virginia Street Bridge—so it was important.

We've had some fun getting together and trying to stay out of trouble, not like our photographs. We just didn't care at that time. What are you going to do? Hang me? [laughs] We felt very strongly about it. Dave and I said, "Well, if it's going to be a fuss, then it's going to be a fuss, but we're going to make sure it's done in the interim."

The Historical Resources Commission is valuable in lots of ways because they have done some good work. There are binders full of those photographs that we took, and these go back to all of the building that took place in Westfield Village that was right after World War II. That was called Victory housing. We went ahead and took photographs of all of those up there on Washington, Gear Street, and Williams. Those were built in 1946 to 1947, and right now those are historic structures, or they're borderline. So you sit tight; you've got record of it. When it does qualify at its hundredth year or one or two of them are still left after...you just don't know what the value is a hundred years from now.

We get really excited when we find photographs. We've got a ton of them already. We haven't got everything. There are things that really excite me. I've had Karen Fuller give me a call who wanted some help on identifying these photographs. I go over and she has a shot of the windmill that furnished the water for the Newlands—the mansion itself and the office. Instead of shooting from the river and showing it from that direction, it is ground level on the bluff and it starts with the windmill. Nobody has ever seen that before. They have no idea what it is, and here this was in the family collection. Somebody had the idea to take the picture at the time. At the time, who cared? Well, we care now. It's all part of our history. We dig deep. We find a lot of excitement in what we do.

Research is a good thing. The true story... like Guy Rocha. Guy Rocha and I see eye-to-eye. The best story is the real story. We don't need to manufacture anything. Uncle Luke didn't invent the first elevator; that is just BS. There happened to be a guy named Otis that was a little bit more involved than Uncle Luke.

It's fun, and when you're able to have some success, to work with other people of like mind, and socialize with other people of like mind...

I'm allowed to represent the Historical Society on field trips, and I always like to talk about them. I like to talk about the Sparks Heritage Museum and even the Verdi people; I show Verdi shots. This is bringing more attention to what they're all about. If people get out and look at the displays and see what's going on, you find yourself getting more and more interested in this.

When you get out there and you're bringing history to groups that aren't necessarily interested in...I talked about this before. I've been asked before if I was part of

the Historical Resources Commission. “Yes, I am, but this is not the same old routine.” I have that in the back of my mind all the time. You go to a Rotary Club or a Lion’s Club, and you’re just a program. You only have twenty-five minutes to condense *Gone With the Wind* and bring it to them, so you do the best you can. There will be 20 to 25 percent of that group that care, and they are absolute gold. So whatever the group is, as long as somebody cares....We’re spoiled to a degree. When you’re invited to do a program up at Gold Hill, they came to see history, plain and simple. The whole audience is yours to either disappoint or please, but they came to hear and see about history.

History is a very important thing. I have to admit to you that it wasn’t always for me. As you age, though, you look backwards and you’ve got your own history to talk about. That is pretty much what we’re doing now. I had no idea I was interesting. [laughs] So that is a wonderful thing too.

When I got into my forties, I had these thoughts that I really missed the boat. I had access to all of the film I could possibly shoot and the full darkroom to process everything. Any camera that I wanted to use I could have walked out with. I could have just borrowed one of the new Leicas, for crying out loud—top of line—or a Speed Graphic or a Rolleiflex, and I didn’t. I hated the business. I didn’t have any of these things. Until my parents passed away, one and then the other, then here we were. Boy, somebody lit the fuse and I’ve been off to the races ever since. To meet people and have them work with you now at the same level, like Eric Moody, who is the curator of manuscripts and wound up as the director at the Historical Society for a while, we worked in this magazine together. He invited just X amount of people to be part of that—people that he wanted to work with and

that he thought he could trust. How do you gain that kind of a reputation unless you’re really sincere about what you do? Seriously.

So I’m very careful because I have a full run of the Historical Society. I wouldn’t jeopardize that by doing anything illegal or wrong. They’re very strict about everything. I can take things out of my own collection, but nobody else’s, and I have to go through the paperwork to sign them out. They want to know where they are, because in the interim they’re responsible for them. These are professional people that take everything they do seriously, and I don’t argue with them. I explain this to other people, that if they want to borrow a photo...Ed Pierce called me saying, “God, I need something on the City of San Francisco stuck up on the hill there in 1952.”

I said, “Well, I’ve got all the stuff, but we’ve got to go down the Historical Society.”

He said, “Well, can you just pull it out and get it for me?”

I said, “Well, if you’ve got a team it would be easier than me going down, going through the paperwork after I find it, and going down to KOLO-TV and having you film it there, and then worry about getting it back.”

Ed said, “Oh, okay. Well, let’s just do it up there, then.”

Other times I’ve gone to the extra effort to take things out, which doesn’t really have a lot to do with the Historical Resources Commission, but I’ve been able to bring all kinds of great photographs in out of the collection to show what was there, why this is important, and be able to throw some light on what is being entertained at the time.

Some of the folks on there haven’t been as fortunate as myself to live here all my life. I know what happened, at least from the early 1940s on. I get accused periodically with people saying, “God, there’s no way you could

know that.” When you bring these things back to an organization like the Historical Resources Commission, you’re adding to the decision-making process that is going to wind up being part of advising.

How does the commission work with the City Council? Do you report to the City Council?

Yes, directly to. We are there for their convenience. When they have questions about something and this is all part of the recommendations that we make, we know more about it, or they think that we do. Whatever we recommend they take very seriously. There have been very few things that they’ve gone against, and there are reasons for that. The Virginia Street Bridge is going to wind up being gone. They’ve let it go into such a state of disrepair. We have a saying at the Historical Resources Commission: demolition by neglect. For the most part, it is either a dollar-motivated lack of maintenance or it’s intentional, but that’s what the end result is. Now it is not stable.

Does the City Council and the public bring things to the commission’s attention?

Yes. You have a public comments section, and we have all kinds of people that have come in and been invited back and put on an agenda to get more in depth. They only have a limited amount of time, like people that are researching books or things like this. They ask for any help that you might be able to give, or anybody that we would like to review for accuracy, and they’ll ask that in public comment.

Then you’ll have a schedule, and Don Naquin used to set this up. Just a wonderful man Don was. What he is doing now...he was one of the most valuable employees that they

had down there at the city, and they laid him off. In any case, he would write up the agenda, and a lot of times people would go through that person. They call down at the city, and they would refer him to Don. Don would check with the chairman of the Historical Resources Commission and lay it out whether to put it on the agenda or not.

Most of the time, anything that had to do with the historic structures or areas, we wanted to be more informed and have those brought before us. A lot of times you didn’t send any of this to the City Council itself. It was part of our education, but you wanted to hear it. We were enlightened lots of times about great projects that they had. They wanted to clean up Virginia Street on the two blocks going from Commercial Road down to the river (actually two and a half if you count where the Masonic Temple is), with all of the very questionable facades of the buildings and stuff. They had really gone to great expense, and a lot of time that was put into this. They wanted to help with the owners to go ahead and put some class back on the face of downtown Reno. That was very interesting.

Another thing that they had brought before us that I thought was really super but it never came to be was we were going to purchase the post office and what we were able to do it.... The designs that they brought forward had some wonderful designs where it terraced on down to the river in the front. It was just great. It would get rid of the flood walls and open things up, but be able to keep the river contained so whatever stepped down to it would be pretty darn bulletproof. It would be heavy-duty concrete.

I’ve got a book in there that shows how to recognize different design work. That was put together by our group. There’s people like Mella Harmon who are really into

architecture, and she was a great chairman and she really knew her stuff. It made reference to the fact that she was part of, but not speaking for the Commission, when they did different programs for Channel 5/Public Television. They did a whole section on the divorce trade, the WPA [Works Progress Administration], and the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] on construction that they had performed around here.

Most people think it's things like the wall there on University Terrace, but you know they built outhouses and they manufactured mattresses, and they did all kinds of stuff around here. Virginia Lake and the island that ran between the two bridges downtown...it's things like this that'll come up in a format that is available to people, and in that regard, the Historical Resources Commission is a valuable asset.

As a Washoe County planning commissioner, I got on the county before because the county goes back to 1861. City of Reno only goes back to 1868. They have a wonderful history. There are things other than downtown Reno. People like myself are interested in all of it. I wanted them to investigate the possibilities of bringing together a historical resources commission for Washoe county. Of course, about the time I got some interest going, the bottom fell out of the economy.

I found this historical plan that the commission had developed. Can you tell me about developing this plan and some of the philosophy behind what was laid out?

Well, right here it says "City of Reno Register of Historic Places." This is about the awards we gave out. Each one of these had been researched and nominated by one person or another. Here we have the Christian

Science Church, which they call the Lear Theater now. It is in the conservation district that we just spent a huge amount of time making sure that we had. It's all about the Historical Resources Commission.

These are not as many houses as I would like to see, because there are quite a few of them. I told you about the one up at 901 Ralston. The other one is over at Joan A_____. There's only so much you can jam into a place like this. You have the Lake Mansion, the Riverside, the NCO down there on Fourth Street, and one of the mansions that was over on Fourth Street too. This was part of what came out of the Historical Resources Commission. The walking tour is not here. Here is a breakdown on what it's supposed to have been...residential, non-residential, adaptive-use landmarks, and so on. We could include these or not on the final...there was different times we didn't have a landmark. As far as an advocate or a distinguished person, we always had that. This tells you all about the whole thing. Yes, the whole works is right here. Here are all of your winners right up to 2009. Nan Speiner is 2009. She was on the board with us, and after she was termed off she got the award. It was either the year after... I got Will Durham that award too. I didn't get him the award; I nominated him and gave the background on it. The rest of the board, fortunately, agreed with me.

Everybody had done the same thing. There isn't a person that isn't represented, as far as being a member of the Historical Resources Commission, that isn't responsible for one of these awards to somebody. I just talked about the ones I had something to do with. Look at how many there are. There is a whole lot of them, so away we go. This is good stuff.

The other thing that was produced and well done, and came from the Historical

Resources Commission, was a booklet on how to recognize the different architecture. It's quite detailed and done beautifully.

Some of the boards were able to really get onto something and parlay it into even more—kind of a chain reaction. “Well, wait a minute. You have this subdivision. What about that subdivision and this subdivision? Which ones do we leave out?” We try not to leave anybody out, but there is only so much time and so much money.

You would be surprised. You get out there in the field...we were up on Gear Street taking pictures of people's houses. They thought we were tax people, and we had to stop. “No, this is who I'm affiliated with, and this is what we're doing. We are just documenting the house as far its historical value.”

Then they want to talk to you and tell you all about it—that they bought it new and so on, which is all great. You write down their names and information on there, and away you go. There are little notes here and there that you had, because the people that are in these neighborhoods know a lot about them.

How has the commission changed over the years?

The subject matter is what really changed. There were hot issues, and then there were things where we were out looking. Other times there was something that was thrown right in our face. I get back to the Virginia Street Bridge. When John Dewey was on the commission, he got in trouble for really going out and being an advocate. He was cautioned. You get onto something that is important to you and you really want to make sure that it is brought full circle. So, he had to back off a little bit. We still were able to bring all of one side forward for review, coming from the viewpoint of people that are part of the

community give a darn about the history of the area. Unfortunately, not everybody does.

I went ahead and I cut a thing out of the newspaper from 1966, where you had urban renewal going on. Claude Hunter wanted to make sure that we could assist people in tearing down these old eyesores and put up something new and modern. It's people like that who have a whole completely different viewpoint...it's like modern-day politics. You've got the Republicans and the Democrats, and we don't see eye-to-eye, do we? It seems like whoever is in power at the time makes some changes, and sometimes those changes...you can't take them back. You can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. It just doesn't work that way. It's really important to bring up on any discussion at any level both sides, and to be calm. That has been a problem with me. [laughs] I'm a very passionate person and I really believe in what I've got myself involved in. I've had successes and I've been stomped on. So you really relish the successes. Those are good.

You do what you can. You put your heart in it and you back it up with as much work as you possibly can. You read and you make sure that you really understand the accuracy value of...you really have to give it that extra effort to dig down deep in your research and make sure that you're right and that you're not going by somebody's writings where they were uninformed or lazy. You want to make sure that history is right. There is only one story.

Can you tell me about the work that you do for the Washoe County Planning Commission?

Well, there is a board of seven of us, and I was just elected chair, so I'm the current chairman now. We change about every two years, so if you get reelected, it's every two years. You never know what is going to

happen. We entertain all kinds of projects, making sure that things are going to be compatible and complementary, to a degree, and legal. Legal is a big deal.

When you go over a project and everything is by the code, everything is right on target, and yet it is going to be somewhere where they're really pushing the envelope and you're impacting the quality of life of other people, well, guess what takes precedence?

Quality of life?

No, I'm sorry to say. It should really be entertained more, but it can't be defended legally. All of the other things, if they are in the right and it says that right here, the best we've been able to do is bring in conditions that you're going to go ahead and do this and you're going to do that. We refer them to the design review people, and that gets into the required landscaping and the types and things that you can buffer. There are suggestions there.

I was very proud of one thing that was brought before us. This had to do with the Marvin Picollo School. What they had brought before us was the equivalent of a Butler building, something you would find in the warehousing district. This was going to be out there in the Southwest in the ranching area, though, with some beautiful houses around. Here was an Econoline...the cheapest possible way to go, but you're not fitting in, and you are really hurting the experience of these children with handicaps of all different kinds. It's a big deal to be able to go into a riding arena that's inside and be out there with the horses. It is just a big experience, so why not complete it and make the structure look like what it is? Make it look a bit like a barn, whether it is functional or not, and have the different doors that would simulate that. Do anything and everything to make it look like

a barn and something that's going to fit into that area. Go the extra cost and complete the experience for the kids.

I had just drawn up a little sketch on there. This is what I had in mind—just something that's simple. Have a double-pitched roof on it instead of a straight gable roof. Why not? You're ordering this prefab building from the metal, but to go ahead with any of the additional things—the paint, the windows, the doors, and things out in front to tie the horse to. Have whatever it was going to take to do this.

We said "We'd like you go come back." We had them come back with a new idea.

"Is that what you're talking about?" They had used a lot of the ideas that I had drawn up, and they'd added a whole bunch of other ones. We said, "Exactly." Instead of being critical of their plan to go in the cheapest possible way to put this thing together, why not figure a way to raise the extra dollars and do it right?

You know what happened out of that? They won prizes for architectural design. [laughs] It was great, and the kids absolutely love it. We were right, because it is all part of it—just driving up and the excitement. I've had people talk to me afterwards that have had their children in there or worked with them, and they say it has made such a difference. They can see it from a distance, and you can just see the eyes start to get wide. They're just all pumped and ready to go. It's a good thing.

So you're able to recommend other commissions like that, which we have...that back up to give ideas. We don't tell them, "This is what you have to do." We suggest what is going to make it a good project.

This was a great experience for myself, because I'm working with professionals, landscape architects, regular architects, and boy, when they go over a landscaping design that is required, they know what's going to

grow, what's not going to grow, what is going to be acceptable and up to code, and not just up to code, but what is actually going to work—the layouts and the whole works. They get nothing but just wonderful suggestions.

When they bring this back to the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners, it goes right on through. "This is what was recommended by design review," and so you go with that.

We've had some very hot issues and were able to make some changes. I can't use some of my colorful language here, but I complain constantly about being on a one-map system where everything that we would do...as opposed to a two-map system where anything that had to do with zoning—changing your zoning or a change to your master plan had to go in front of a regional board. The cities of Reno and Sparks did not have to do that because they were on the two-map setup, and your zoning map was a separate map. It was in your area of authority, so you called the shots.

Well, we didn't have that and we ran into a whole bunch of problems. It wound up with other people trying to...we had a plan revision, like we had the Southwest all the way down into Mt. Rose, where it was a full map change [Area Plan update] for them. Then you had people wanting to bring in a zoning change—a first step to subdivision, and we couldn't stop it. It was accepted there, and even if we turned it down in the county, by the time it went to the cities and they thought it would be a possible idea...something that would be so large that it would be better served by the Reno and would be subject to annexation.

They're setting the steps so that you can do other things for supporting something that the municipality which is really in charge doesn't have the say on their own. We had to change that, and we were able to, and that's just something that's been very recent. This happened last year.

We had all kinds of problems down in Washoe Valley where we had to go according to the regional plan and allow these different things in there that shouldn't be in there. They should have gone on their own merit and it should have been part of a project that was stipulated rather than just a convenient change of zoning within the confines of an area plan update.

So there have been adjustments there. We came under a huge amount of fire. There must have been fifteen additional meetings that we had to have down in the Mt. Rose area to really try and put more teeth into a scenic area and the designation that goes with that, a scenic corridor. Well, that is what the Mt. Rose Highway has. Why aren't we paying attention to it?

They eventually want to build 650 houses. That was just wrong, and we had all the neighbors up in arms, and yet we couldn't do a darn thing about it. We were handicapped because we had to go along with the regional plan update, and, of course, that's going to go before who? Before the regional board, which we were outvoted on. Every time you turn around, it was the governing board, and you would lose seven to three. City of Reno has one extra vote and Sparks had three. The county had three, so we would lose these things like that. What business is it of theirs having it brought to a level where they can go ahead and call the shots? It's not their area to administer to. It is just not. That was something that needed to be changed, and I'm really happy that it has been.

There's been other things that have been hot issues. You get into the windmills that were on top of the Paha Range, and there were people that were all for it. It turns out that the people that were all for it were people that were going to benefit. These were large parcels that are out there, and there was dollar amounts for access, and they were supportive of it. So you have forty of these 450-foot

windmills on top of a range. What's that say as far as really caring about your scenic value of this beautiful state? I got into it with them on the basis that if you take these things down so that they're fronting the wind source, they're not breaking the ridgeline. They said, "Well, they're more efficient if they're up here. Otherwise, we'd have to build more."

I said, "Well, I think you ought to build more of them and put them where you're taking into consideration the scenic value of the state." I mean, I'm going up Pyramid Highway...if you just look over there, you'd be able to see a row of these things. Well, that had to go through, and you know why? We didn't have the people it directly affected come and put up any kind of an argument against it because they were going to benefit from it.

So that is something that you've got to go by. What are the codes? What are the rest of it? If they have a perfect right to do it, they can justify it, and they can go ahead and get it around the EPA...everywhere where their lines were going to be was on private property.

There was another outfit that came in and they had to use the BLM. They were subject to a four-year study by the EPA. Well, these other people weren't. You have all kinds of ways to get around things, and you recognize it and you try and do something about it. Unless you got help from the neighborhood itself, you're sticking your neck out in somebody else's neighborhood. If that's what they want, okay. Legally they have every right to do that. They don't have to make the adjustments that I had suggested about trying to modify this where you're not offensive to an entire view line. Things like that happen.

Of course, we have the cell towers. We got creative in a couple of places...the tree didn't look like a tree. Do you know what I'm talking about? The cell tower that was decorated like

a tree, up on Mt. Rose Highway. All the birds don't land on it.

The birds can tell the difference?

The birds can tell the difference. We've got this clock tower that was in Sun Valley, and it hasn't been kept up. Right now it's broken on one side. There was an all-out effort to try and disguise these things so they're not the focal point of a neighborhood. Oh, my god, you've got a cell tower right in your backyard?

Well, they're trying, and I think things will improve on that. You can make these things so there's fewer of them because all these different carriers share the antenna sites. You have different things that'll show up, though.

Out in Washoe Valley one time...this was when I was on the Board of Adjustment. I was on the BOA for eight years. I've been on the Planning Commission for five years. When I was on the BOA, we entertained special-use permits. This fellow, one of the ranchers out there in Washoe Valley, wanted to put up a helipad for his helicopter. Of course, everybody else was all excited about that. "Well, if he goes across my property, he's going to be spooking the cattle. He's going to be..."

We were able to entertain this and come up with a couple of suggestions. Number one, if it's a condition that they research...there are these decibel readings that are generated by different types of helicopters. They hadn't bought the helicopter yet. If you make it so the sound level was going to be one of the lower ones, that would be a good idea.

The best idea that we came up with...I said, "Look it. Instead of flying over anybody else's property, why not follow the freeway, which is just about as noisy as you can get. Make a right turn to your property, and go ahead and land it."

“Oh, well, yeah, that would work.” Why didn’t somebody think about that as far as the planner side? They’re looking at the structural aspect of how they can do this, and the placement and everything is to accommodate the applicant. Well, what about the people around it? If it’s a simple solution like that... we’ve never heard anything back on that.

We’ve had to entertain billboards, and I’m a member of Scenic Nevada, and I had to really watch my step on that. That was mostly with the Board of Adjustment before I was on Scenic Nevada, though. We had one with a local attorney that is up by where the old Jubilee Club was. This is as you go up the steep grade to get to the turn to go into Washoe City, where all the houses are on the east side of the lake. Well, it was in disrepair and it was blowing around—doing all kinds of things—and so we wanted it repaired. They didn’t go along with it.

First thing you know, there is the attorney’s name on this billboard, and he is fighting for them in exchange for his advertising. We wound up getting a court judgment, and the damn thing is still up. So, enforcement is a bit of a problem. You can give all the direction in the world, and unless the people at ground level actually enforce it...it’s goofy things like that that come around, but for the most part, we have been able to sort out different problems, make a project better than what it was, and get good cooperation from the people who want to get an okay on this. They say, “If that’s going to load your pistol, if that’s going to please you, or if that will calm things down...if we go ahead and stain the foreign material so it’s going to look like we haven’t disturbed the roadway that goes up to this new house that the guy is building on the side of the hill, will that pacify everybody?”

“Yes, it will.”

You can make it a condition, and we will follow it, and that’s what we do. It seems to calm down the neighbors, but people have rights and other people have rights, too. When you get yourself in the middle like that, you’re looking for ways to address both of them. A lot of times you can get them to talk with each other, and we’ve had a huge amount of that happen over the years. We ask “Have you sat down and actually talked with each other?”

“Well, no.”

“Would you go for a continuance until we can go ahead and really get something that’s going to please both of you, that you can bring to the table, if that’s at all possible?”

You’d be surprised at the high percentage of people that say, “Oh,” and they’ve worked it out. They come back, pass it, and away they go.

You have to entertain changes in codes, and that’s very important too. Fence guidelines are different in the cities than they are in the county. When you have different properties that are on a corner as opposed to one that has just the front of a property facing the street, there has to be a four-foot fence. Well, how far back do you have to keep the four-foot fence? Is it going to be obscuring the line of vision that would cause a traffic hindrance? You don’t have that problem if it’s not allowed past the front of the house. What can staff do to actually look at it and say, “Okay. What is going to be acceptable and not be a problem, for the traffic or the rest of it?”

You can have other people that have authority, like the director of a community development organization can step in and give an administrative variance. They operate with a huge amount of common sense and they say, “This is just an exception to all of the standard rules.” We get a full report on that.

There are many things that come before a Planning Commission or a Board of Adjustment, though not nearly as much as the Board of County Commissioners. Anything that has been tested through an appeal process...there's been decisions that we've made against a developer that they've got the money to appeal it, and they do. For the most part, they have supported our vote, though. There have been very few exceptions.

There was one fellow up in the back of Hidden Valley who got a whole bunch of property, and he was counting on the new road going through by the Clearwater process thing that is out there, but that is just a little dirt road right now. To go ahead and build a housing development up there and create all of the extra traffic on Hidden Valley as it is right now would be a hardship on that community. Unless this is a reality and it's not something that some day we're going to do, he was turned down.

Well, it was just recently he came back and he has the lower part of eighty acres...he has five acres that's down at the bottom cut in half for high-density rural, which would allow him to build a structure on two and a half acres. So he wants to do something with his property.

Well, two homes isn't going to cause the impact that [a larger development] would on that community, so we went ahead and passed that, but he had to go through an appeal process on us turning him down, and the County Commission supported us on that. The poor guy is trying to do something with a huge investment that he's got. Well, that's his problem, really. Can we do the right thing by everybody? He came back in with something that's reasonable that's not going to have as much impact, and it went right through.

I made the motion, and I was his biggest critic. He came up and said, "Jeez, Neal, thank you."

I said, "Don't thank me. Thank yourself for bringing something in that we could support." If you make it easy on us—and I've used the term a no-brainer, that's a straightforward proposed—I'm looking for a motion. Who's got a motion? You get one and we stop utilizing their time. They got an okay to go and they hit the door.

There are some unreasonable folks that come in that want to test your patience and so on. All of the different governmental entities have that. You have the guitar player, and the encyclopedia of Reno, and all of this other stuff. People are in there that are just...he's fun and he's sharp, the guy that does that, but he also has to speak on every agenda and take up time. Other people are there one time probably in their entire life. He is there every meeting and wants to talk on every one of the subjects. You have other people that want to take the opportunity to just barely tie their comments into a project to be able to call the city of Reno Council people a bunch of morons, commies, and the rest of it.

They are out there, and there is a certain amount of it that you have to take as long as it's not straight obscenities or it's confrontational. Then you don't have to take it. Then they're going to be out. They have got the right to their three minutes, though, providing they go by the rules that are set up, so you go with it. There is a little bit of a bite-your-lip session going on when this hits, and that's just part of the game. It's not really a game. It's important, but you have to understand when you get into these positions that it's going to happen.

I have been able to allow people that were so scared of that microphone...they get up there and we say, "Well, we need your name." You don't want to say it like that. I say, "Well, I hate to interrupt, but just for records we need you to identify yourself." You can say it like that. When they're stopping and starting

and carrying on, they can't find their paper, they're scratching their head, and they start to speak and it's a stutter, bend the rules and give them some time to settle down and be able to speak.

Again there are people for whom that would be the only time in their entire life that they would address any kind of a body whatsoever, and you want to be as accommodating and courteous as you possibly can. To be short with people and critical of people...who in the world do you think you are? I don't prescribe to that, and neither do any of the people that I work with.

I've just been taking over for Diane Vanderwell, and she was an excellent chairman, and before that it was Christy Majors, who just did a beautiful job. Guess what? They were good with people, and it makes a big difference.

Has the commission dealt with cultural or historic preservation?

There have been barns and roadways that other people wanted to see saved. Right out here on the Three Flags here in Golden Valley, that was the first paved highway that was around here, and they've been able to keep the markers that the Trails West organization put up and made note. There is a little center over there...a little side mall that's on that property, and guess what the name of it is? Three Flags. The three flags were for Nevada, Oregon, and California. They've left the marker alone, and the people that developed it know the history of the place.

There are other times when you have a historic structure that people come in knowing good and well it would be part of a good sales pitch to say, "We want to use this as part of..." You see that out in Washoe Valley, like the old Pony Express and the post office that is there that has been rebuilt. It's a real

estate office, and that was all fallen down. They rebuilt the thing back up and kept all of the walls that they possibly could. When they had done that, in talking with some of the people that were on the Planning Commission at the time, that was part of their package that they wanted to do. "We want that as the entrance. It is respect to the heritage of this area, and we want to use that as an office."

Of course, they have all these nice new homes in behind it. They're beautiful houses, all on one acre so it goes with the lifestyle out there. That is what that building was, though. A lot of people don't know that, but that came in as part of their package to get an okay on a development. They're looking at how can they fit in, so they do. This is great when they do that.

Other times the concern that is brought up by any of the other people has to be entertained. We have the perfect right as the commissioners to question staff and the developer after their public comment that is within the confines of the project. You have separate public comments. You have one at the very beginning and now we've added another one on at the very end, too, so they have two different chances to speak on issues that are not on the agenda. Then there is a public comment section as pertaining to just that project, where people come up and bring things to light, asking, "Well, what about that?" Whether it's an encroachment...

There's been different times when something of a historic nature has come up, and I will ask the person, "Well, can you accommodate this?"

"Oh, we didn't know. Well, certainly we could." So it's pretty much fixed.

That's another reason why people should really talk to each other. They might have had that in part of their package and worked it all out so it wasn't an argument. Everybody that shows up is in support of the plan instead of

people coming that are concerned that they're going to screw up your well.

We've had some hot issues on wells. Will Rogers said a long time ago that whiskey's for drinking and water's for fighting. There is one hell of a fight on the horizon. We've seen that out in back of Montreux, and even with the power company, as they've sunken different wells and other people's have gone dry. There are things that they can do legally. Domestic water rights don't even say "rights." You have domestic access. I have that on my property here.

If somebody came in here and sunk a big well and had all of the water rights before they put in some stop points after they're established now, there is a defense for it. Legally, though, who can be defended? The guy with the water rights or the guy that's just taking advantage of what's underground right now? There are times when a large development will affect a whole area, where they really legal. You'll see even more in the future. It'll only happen so much.

In fact, at WC2—1 or 2—you actually have to have the water in the ground, not the rights to pump. You have X amount of acre-feet of water. Well, what if there's no water down there? So it's what is actual, factual, recognized, and bona fide source of... there is room for all kinds of problems.

Our friend Bill Isaef spent his entire legal career on water-rights issues, and it's going on and on. Even where you have plenty of water, you'll have people that still are going to be slighted one way or the other and want to go ahead and get their rights recognized. Take Seattle and the area around there. They've got plenty of water, but when they have a dry spell, then there is a big argument. Seattle with a dry spell? Well, it's happened.

How has the cultural landscape of Reno changed over the years?

Well, the cultural landscape has changed big time, because we have a huge amount of new residents. They're going to bring their values and their concerns with them. Unfortunately, a lot of the people that will buy into an area don't realize what it was at one time. They're not accepted all that friendly when we say, "We used to have that beautiful pasture out there. Now we've got all of these houses."

We experienced that right here in Golden Valley. We have all the people right across Golden Valley Road in back of the high school, and they don't participate in anything that the Valley here does. They've got their own homeowners' group, and we don't socialize to any degree. Why is that? Well, there's a cultural split.

When you say "culture," there is more importance to it and more things that are brought forward. With Artown, you're bringing all of this in, and it's just a wonderful thing. We have some of the best programs and shows you ever saw in your life over at the Pioneer auditorium, or the "Golden Turtle," as I like to call it, and up at Lawlor Events Center.

We still have high name-brand entertainment, but it doesn't come in the show lounges anymore; they're presented in a different venue. To be able to see Neil Diamond...or I was dragged to see this thing they call Tap Dogs, and I just thought, god...I didn't want to go. I had never even been in the Pioneer theater. It was built in 1964 and I'm a hardhead. The State Building was there before that; that was built in 1926.

In any case, I get dragged to this thing. My wife got these tickets and said, "You're going." I think I enjoyed that program more than any one I've ever seen. These guys were so wonderful, and I had no idea that something like that could be done in a stage performance that was there. I went to Riverdance down

there. My gosh, we had Riverdance here. We had the Lord of the Dance with Michael Flatley. I always call him Flattery, but it's Flatley. It was just super, and that was over at Lawlor. These things are available to us all the time.

You have people that come in that are in the sports world, like high-profile golfers. You want to go ahead and see the celebrities? They're going to be out there. It is the same way with any of the competitive bike racing and any of your snow sports. We have Olympians, for crying out loud, that have come from here. Greg LeMond, the first non-European winner of the Tour de France, was born and raised in Reno. The bike that he used was another person...the guy built in his garage LeMond's bike that he used during that race was right here in Reno. We have Olympians that have competed in all different sports.

This is an amazing place. It's a wonderful place to live. People will bring the good things with them as well as the difference of opinion. See how well I said that? I can be tactful on occasion. We have a smorgasbord of very diverse activities, viewpoints, and things that pertain directly to entertainment and to a quality of life, and that comes in many forms. It's all right here. I believe that we're ahead of the game.

I have been known to say, and this is kind of sarcastic, that I really believe the quality of the people had nothing to do with being a native or a new person; it's whether you give a damn about the place that you want to call home and whether you're a community contributor. There are people that I've known all my life that don't give a damn one way or the other, and there are new people that just complain about everything. Then there are the other people that really enjoy and want to tell you about it, and brag about...and say, "God, you've got to come out here and check this out. This is a wonderful place." It all depends on the individual.

Fortunately, we have more people that really love the Reno-Sparks area than the complainers, so that's been a major plus. What I've always said, when I was watching a huge amount of change and getting upset about it, is, "What are you complaining about, Neal? You're one of the lucky ones. You have seen a Reno that no one else that has come to town will ever see." So I straighten my shoulders and I say, "You know, I'm one of the lucky ones."

I like to run with that attitude, and it makes me fit in better socially. You don't want to offend people just because they don't agree with you, but there are times when you really need to toot your horn and tell people what a wonderful area this is and how the state's history had a direct impact on the United States itself. Things like out of the Comstock, or bonanza barons like Mackey...what else did he do besides that? Well, he laid the first transatlantic cable, all the way to Europe. That's what he did.

You had George Hearst. He had a son. His name was Randolph. That money came from...you had Sharon, and Sharon's daughter married Senator Newlands. He wasn't a senator at the time. Here you have a U.S. senator that made a major impact around here with the Newlands project and everything. You can dig down deep in this and really find out there were some very creative people that were visionaries, and they're all part of this area in one way or the other.

Frank Church, that developed a way to measure the snow and the water content was at the University of Nevada, for crying out loud. There are all kinds of wonderful things that you can relate to the area. If you open your eyes and your heart, and are positive, you can enjoy every one of them. It's just that simple. It took me a while to learn it, but I'm a simple man. Age has its pluses and minuses, and I figure I'm really ahead of the game on that one.

LENA COVELLO

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Lena Covello: I was born in Fallon. My family was living in Fernley at the time, so I wasn't in the hospital very long. My mom brought me home the same day. That was June 13th, 1951.

How old were you when you moved to Reno?

I was probably around eight years old, and it was 1959. Reno was very different. The outskirts of town were at Peckham Lane, and we lived on a ranch out there. I've seen a lot of changes in Reno and a lot of trees mature. [laughter]

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

My mom was Mary Franco Covello. She was a third-generation Nevadan. She was born in Smith Valley near Yerington. My grandmother, Lillian Beard Franco Asparean, was a writer. She wrote articles for

the newspaper in Yerington as well as some short stories. I'm from a family of seven children—two boys, five girls. My dad died when I was about six, and my mom remarried when I was around eleven or twelve. My dad was a foreman for Isabel Construction and he worked on most of the main highways here in Nevada.

I went to Echo Loder School for a while. Then, I went on homebound (a teacher would visit the house to give me lessons) until my senior year when I went into Wooster High School. I've also gone to Truckee Meadows Community College and Ralston School of Massage. Since then, I've taken training in various massage schools, including the Acupressure Institute of San Francisco.

Did your schools have any art, music, or theater programs when you were growing up?

When I was real young, we lived in Silver City, just down the hill from Virginia City. I went to this wooden schoolhouse where we would sing all sorts of different songs. It was

a school where the high school students and the elementary students were all in one room. Everybody was assigned their work, but we would come together and sing.

At Echo Loder elementary school in Reno, I probably went on homebound in the third grade, so there wasn't an awful lot. A music teacher would come in once in a while and play songs and try to teach us songs.

Were cultural things important to your family?

My family is made up of musicians and they would jam into the middle of the night. [laughter]. My mom was a piano player; my brother Johnny played lead guitar and sang; my brother-in-law, Jimmy, was a drummer, and my other brother-in-law, Dick, played rhythm guitar. The rest of us would chime in vocally during songs that we knew. It was a very important part of my family's get-togethers, because we would do that periodically—get together and play music. My mom also loved poetry and would recite it or start singing in the spur of the moment. So, yes, we were exposed to poetry and music a lot.

I know that you were pretty young when you moved to Reno, but what were your first impressions?

What I was really taken with was downtown Reno, which, at that time, probably wasn't all that exciting. I can remember seeing the neon lights and Harolds Club had this huge sign—at least it was huge to me. It was in a Western motif with the Indian sneaking and looking out over this encampment of wagon trains, and there was a waterfall on it; I just was so taken with it. That's what I remember going through downtown.

My mom would always take us downtown. It was a family tradition, like when she would

take us to Lake Tahoe. Going through Cave Rock, we always had to blow the horn. It was that type of thing.

I can remember going to the five-and-dime store on Sierra Street. Talk about a kid in a candy store. I was in awe. Coming from Silver City, it was a pretty big town for us.

What do you remember in Reno in terms of arts and cultural organizations in the 1960s and 1970s?

The Pioneer Center was fairly new, and they would bring in tour groups and bands. That was the main cultural center in the 1960s and 1970s. That is probably when it was built. The Coliseum, which is now the Events Center, was built in the 1970s too.

Besides that, there were community organizations like the Basque community and church groups, but my family wasn't involved in those. Of course, we had the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Reno used to celebrate by dying the river green; it was quite an event. Now everybody goes out for green beer, but they don't have the parade anymore.

How did you get involved in Sparks Little Theater?

In the 1970s, I enrolled in Truckee Meadows Community College. I had always been a fan of musicals and of theater. I love watching them and playing the soundtracks. My mom was the same way—she even had some 75s. From there, I went in, started doing small parts backstage, and mainly worked a lot as the stagehand for Truckee Meadows.

Then I became involved with Reno Little Theater, and, frankly, I wasn't getting cast for the parts. [laughs] I thought, "Well, heck, if they aren't going to cast me, I'm going to open

my own theater and do what I want to do.” I had heard through Nevada Casting, which I had taken classes with, been involved in, and been an extra on movies, that there was a lady in town who was interested in forming a theater. Her name is Caryn Hawman. I got in touch with her. We got a group together and we were doing little plays in warehouses or for Girl Scouts and whoever wanted it. We would do it at their venue because we didn’t have a theater. We had to go to the venue and perform there. So, we became a traveling troupe.

Caryn was did an interview on TV on City Stages. Howard Scriven saw the show and called up and said he had a nonprofit, Sparks Little Theatre, and he wanted to give it to us with all the props and costumes. and he was leaving town. He told her that he was the nephew of one of the Spany and Our Gang’s members and that he had always been involved in theater. That’s how we got Sparks Little Theater.

From there, we started doing plays with nonprofits. Whatever we made, we split with the nonprofits. We did the Story Theater and Fractured Melodramas. We were also accepted in the Young Audience Program in the elementary schools; that was a lot of fun. Of course, you have to be your own roadie and set up your set and take it down when you travel.

Then, Caryn got very busy with her business and church and decided to let the theater go, so that’s when I took over. I did a condensed version of *Madame Butterfly* at Piper’s Opera House, because I had a friend, Shirley Shockey-Hogg, who was in the opera chorus and had done a recital. I said, “This is too good. We have to do more performances.” And she agreed.

From there, I was approached by Piper’s Opera House to write a story about Emma

Nevada, who had performed there. She was a famous opera star in the late 1800s and early 1900s, who was born in Nevada City and raised in Austin, Nevada. We performed it three times in Piper’s Opera House and twice in Brewery Arts Center in Carson City for Nevada Day. I entered *Emma* in the Nevada Day Parade. She was riding in a beautiful carriage drawn by two horses and she won first place. I was very pleased.

I did a lot of research on Emma. I got very involved in the project. It captured me; it captured my heart. Now I’m taking some training and I’m tackling the screenplay. She was a wonderful and inspirational person. It was well worth putting the effort in.

Can you tell me about the research process that you went through for the play, places you went and how long it took you?

It’s actually an ongoing thing, but I started out checking on the Internet. They had a little website up on Emma Nevada and I found out her grandfather was one of the founding members of the University of Michigan. I went to the historical society here and researched all the newspaper articles they had. I contacted Austin, Nevada, and they also had some information. I went up to Nevada City and went to their historical society as well. I also traveled to Mills College in Oakland and went through what they had.

I also went over to England. The thing was, I didn’t know you needed to make an appointment in advanced, so I was only able to do some research in the libraries. I was able to see Covent Garden Opera House, where Emma and her daughter had performed.

It’s kind of amazing because there’s a lot of material that I’ve collected, and I’m just amazed that more hasn’t been done for her. Not only was she an opera star, but she was

quite a linguist. She knew something like seven different languages and was the first person to tour, giving concerts and doing costume changes.

Also, whenever she went into a country, people would approach her and say, "I have this young girl with a great talent. Can you help her?" So, when she stopped performing, she ended up giving voice lessons. She had over three hundred different students that she kept in correspondence with before she died.

When they had the World's Fair in California, they declared her the Empress of Treasure Island. They invited her to come over, but at that time she was advanced in age and had to decline. That was really very special.

She spoke Washoe, Paiute, and Shoshone Native American languages. She was raised by her housekeeper, Mary, after her mother died when she was nine. Her housekeeper was a Paiute and her husband worked on her father's ranch. Her father was also a medical doctor.

Austin was well known for horse racing. They had horse races and bred horses up there. They also cashiered the mustangs out there, so she became very efficient in driving a team of horses. She would drive a team of horses every day as part of her exercise.

When she went to Mills Seminary in Oakland to continue her education, she would travel back and forth to Austin, and since the people on the stage knew her, she would ride up on top and she would spell the driver. [laughs] She was not very big, as you can tell, but she had quite a spirit.

Can you tell me about the format of the play?

The play is narrated by different people from Emma's life as it is acted out on stage.

Emma's mother and different characters tell the story, and Emma comes out and performs her songs. I worked with my director, Jon Fay, to decide what songs to include.

There is a lot of information in the play. It is very interesting. She was friends with Verdi and performed for him twenty-one times. She knew a lot of the big people. Her godmother was Mrs. John Mackay from silver strike in Virginia City. It's kind of funny because Emma was married in Paris, and Mrs. Mackay had her wedding cake (that weighed 160 pounds) made in London and transported to Paris for the wedding. It was so big that when Emma stood behind it, you couldn't see her. She came over to the United States to tour on her honeymoon, and she brought some of the cake with her to share with her friends in Austin. It's kind of interesting. She handed it out to all the people that came to hear her sing.

She had orange blossoms shipped in from Nice for her wedding. Being that she was an American marrying an Englishman in Paris, there was a little snafu and they almost didn't get married because of it. Finally, at the last minute they got it squared away so she could get married. There were write-ups about her wedding. I've had a lot of fun recreating the costumes, researching her, and writing her story.

Who are some of the actors and actresses that were involved in the productions?

My niece, Mary McNeill, has been performing since high school, and when she went to UNR, she was in the Nevada Opera Chorus. She became a professional pop singer, so she became my Emma Nevada. She has a lovely voice. My piano player was Donna Axton, Hoyt Axton's wife, who teaches at the Sierra Nevada College. My director was Jon

Fay, who taught voice at UNR. He was a very talented man who performed for the Nevada Opera.

I also had a violinist named Jon Obester who is now performing with Tacota Orchestra. Our guitarist was Dason who goes by the professional name of Tumbleweed Tex. John Coney played various parts and was a narrator at times. The original narrators were Suzanne Chase and Paul Cox. I tried to involve as many people as I could.

You had two productions at Piper's Opera House and two at Brewery Arts. Were you involved with Nevada Day?

Yes and they were very well attended. We did it on Nevada Day. I can't tell you the exact numbers now, but Piper's has a capacity of about three hundred and it was near capacity.

Can you tell me about Piper's Opera House?

Piper's Opera House is wonderful, and they're restoring it, which it definitely deserves. It's one of the oldest functioning opera houses in America. It was really neat because, at that time, they still had the oleo up, which was the curtain. In the 1800s, they used the oleo for sponsors' advertisements; sponsors would write their advertisement on the curtain. There was an advertisement for milk and an advertisement for bread; it was something like five cents for a loaf of bread. It was pretty amazing. I know that the Smithsonian wanted to take that oleo, but I don't know if Piper's Opera House has done that.

The last time I was up there, they wanted to reconstruct the downstairs bar, which was where Mark Twain used to go when he was in Virginia City. He was a well-known patron there. The floors are wooden and on springs,

for dancing. They used to do roller skating and athletic things like basketball there. The corners of the ceiling are rounded for the acoustics and the whole thing is covered with canvas because canvas bounces the sound back down; it has lovely sound. I really loved working in there because you didn't need a lot of amplification. That's how the old theaters were constructed. It's a wonderful theater and I enjoyed being in it.

We split the profits with Piper's Opera House again. It was costly but Piper's paid for a New York opera and theatre critic, Glenn Looney, to give two lectures on Emma. Mr. Looney had a personal connection with Emma Nevada. As a young boy in Nevada City he was inspired to write about Emma for a school project and thus started his passion for opera. I was so taken with the story that I incorporated it into the play, making him one of the narrators.

I arranged for refreshments and had commemorative champagne glasses that we sold at intermission. I did the tickets, advertising, and reservations as well. I did the same for *Madame Butterfly* performances. You have to think of all of this. When you are a one-man act, it keeps you pretty busy.

When were these performances at Piper's Opera House?

It was probably ten years ago, because I still have the glasses up in my cupboard. We also did a tea in the Mackay Mansion gazebo after the *Emma Nevada* show, which was kind of fun. I tried to involve the community, so the Girl Scouts sold Girl Scout cookies and made posters of different pictures of Emma and different articles for the tea. I thoroughly enjoyed it. There's a joy in seeing something that's your baby and that you've created, performed.

How was the play received?

It was received very well. We had a full-page article in the *Reno Gazette*, which really helped a lot. When we did it in Brewery Arts Center, we got another big article in the *Nevada Journal*. They reported on it, so that was free advertisement, which, with community theater, is always greatly welcomed. [laughs] That was definitely wonderful...more than I ever expected.

When did you and Caryn inherit Sparks Little Theater from Howard Scribbon?

It was probably in the 1990s.

Where were you having rehearsals and performances?

We rehearsed in her house, my basement, in warehouses, in garages, and anywhere we could. [laughs] Of course, when we set up in the venue that we were in, we would run through whatever performance we were doing. Sometimes we were lucky enough that we could get a few auditions in the venue, but it costs money to rent the place.

What venues do you remember using?

We used libraries and elementary schools. We also performed in the Sparks Amphitheater. We've done performances at Brewery Art Center. We did a Halloween performance in the Ramada downtown. They had a birthday party for people over one hundred, and we were invited to provide the entertainment for it. We really didn't set up a stage for that; we just came in and performed. That was very interesting.

We were a traveling group. We went out to an elementary school which was quite a

ways north of Winnemucca in the desert. We mainly performed in the elementary schools in the Reno-Sparks area, though.

Was there ever a core group of people who were involved?

Yes. There was Caryn and myself, Gloria Oberg, John Cooney, George Randolph, Chris Nelson, Mary, and Emmanuel. It has been a while. There were other people involved as we needed them from auditions.

Were there any changes in participation in Sparks Little Theater over the years?

Oh, yes. Over the years, performers would drop out for various reasons. Then, we would recast the part.

It was really fun, though. In one of the Melodramas I was a damsel in distress and, over time, I had three different heroes. The pilot was the bank was foreclosing on our ranch, and the wicked banker wanted to have his way with me to save our home—complete with the black cape, top hat, and mustache. My hero was an aviator—outfitted in a leather jacket and goggles and a scarf—who wins the Reno Air Races and saves the day. [laughs] It was great fun.

How many performances in a season do you remember putting on at the Sparks Little Theater?

I would say fifteen to twenty. We were pretty actually active.

How many plays would you do?

We did about four or five plays. On one of our first productions, we rented a warehouse and set up the theater inside of it. We did three

one-act plays. From there, there was a play that we were invited to read [unclear] and perform because it dealt with domestic violence. I was in *Graceland*. I was *the* Elvis Presley fan, which was a lot of fun. When you're in that type of theater it becomes minimal theater because you don't want to carry around a lot of props. So we did that. We also performed it at the Mayes Museum, Brewery Arts Center, and the Sparks Amphitheatre.

My favorite was the story theaters because they told such great stories—one about an old person saving the day during a famine, because the person they were going to take out and leave in the forest knew that they could take the thatch from the roof and use the grain to plant for wheat, so Grandpa saved the day. [laughs] We had different stories like that, *Old Joe and the Carpenter*. It was great fun.

How did you decide which plays to do?

We wanted to do uplifting plays. Of course, we tried to pick something that had some value and meaning to it. Sometimes we did comedies, which were a lot of fun. Caryn mainly decided what material we did until I took over. When I took over, the musical part came into it because I've always loved musical theater. So, that's where we did the condensed version of *Madame Butterfly* and *Emma Nevada*. Those were mainly my decisions.

Before then, Caryn Hawman did most of the casting and decisions on the scripts. I helped out doing some of the directing, but for the main part, she did the directing and casting, and I was the promoter. I would go out and get venues to use. I would do advertising and perform with the troupe; that was my input there. I was sort of the networking person. Then, when it became just myself, I did everything.

How did the community seem to embrace Sparks Little Theater?

They were very cordial. For most part, when we approached people, they were very open to helping us or wanting us to perform. We were all doing other full-time jobs. It is actually a full-time job in itself. The community was very open to it, which was wonderful, because we would perform at libraries or different elementary schools. When I approached people for rental space or advertising, they were always very open and willing to do what they could for us. It's just getting it all organized. You have to love it.

How well attended were the performances?

The elementary school performances were very well attended. They had to be there, but I think they really enjoyed the show. The only one that really kind of bombed out—and I think it was because we were competing with Hot August Nights—was the one at [unclear]. For most part, though, they were well attended.

Did it cost to attend performances?

Yes. We charged admission. What we usually did, if we were working with a theater like Brewery Art Center or Piper's Opera House, was split the house with them. If we rented the venue, we would keep the profits, but, at that time, the tickets were maybe seven to ten dollars. We always tried to make it affordable. If you brought your family, there was a package price. Caryn and I would get together and decide on the prices.

Sometimes we performed for free. We performed for the Girl Scouts because they were having a big convention. We performed for Nevada Fine Arts for their appreciation

day and for all their docents. We performed at the Historical Society venue and in lieu of payment, they gave us Emma's portrait. There really wasn't a stage so we created a performance space. We've made space do sometimes. If it wasn't really a theater, we would make it one anyway.

Did you have other sources of funding besides ticket sales?

Yes. We wrote grants to the Nevada Arts Council, which, unfortunately, no longer exists. I understand it has been absorbed into some state department. We got a couple of grants from them, and we were developing more opportunities like that. Mainly, though, that is who we received grants from.

Did you have a lot of expenses besides the rentals?

Costumes, gas coming and going, and it was our thought that the performers should be paid even if it was just a stipend. We thought they should be given a little money because they were giving their time and talents. So, we always tried to pay our performers. That was one of the rules. Community theaters don't usually do that, but Caryn and I had decided upon it, being that we had performed ourselves and knew how much it took.

Did Sparks Little Theater receive any honors or awards during the time you were involved?

Just the First Place Trophy for the Nevada Day Parade and that full-page article in the *Reno Gazette*.

When I was involved with Reno Little Theater, I had a friend, Gloria Olberg, who I performed with. She entered her one-act

play in the one-act competitions, and we won the Nevada state competition. We went to regionals in California and we won. Then, we went to national and we were the first play to perform. That was a little nerve-racking, but we came in fourth place. It was a very interesting, surreal play called *Cornerstone*. That was really exciting, so that was a big thing. I don't think too many people can say that they went all the way to national and came in fourth.

Were there any noticeable changes in Sparks Little Theater during the time you were involved?

Oh, absolutely. Theater is a collaborative art form and is always changing, so you're always performing with different artists, and each artist brings something different to a character or play. You have to change, in order to keep it fresh. It has to be a living thing. The material changed drastically when I took it over. It went from being melodramas and story theaters to being musicals and operettas; that was one of the major changes.

In the past, when Scriven had it, he did melodramas and story theater as well. Now that the theater is basically defunct, I've given a lot of scripts to Reno Little Theater. They are going to open up a children's theater. That's their plan in the near future, so they can use those. We had original scripts we created, so I was very happy to pass those on to other people. I'd say those are the major changes.

When did Sparks Little Theater close up shop?

We probably closed up shop eight years ago, around 2003. One of the major reasons was I became ill. I had an accident and I couldn't deal with all the work that was

necessary. I decided to go and see a faith healer in Brazil, John of God; I packed up all my things into storage and went to Brazil. When I was doing that, I donated a lot of my props and sets to Truckee Meadows Community College as well. I still have things that I would like to donate. We have a storage space in the Roundhouse in Sparks. It's up on a loft, which I can't get to, but one of these days I will get that all taken care of.

As far as *Emma Nevada* goes, I gave all the costumes and props for that play to my niece in hopes she would take them and start touring it around the country, but she has a four-year-old boy right now. We were just talking the other day, though, about doing something with *Emma*. At this point, the costumes would have to be changed.

Lena, you mentioned there are some things from our last session that we didn't include that you wanted to talk about.

It has to do with my new project of writing screenplays. I've been doing a lot of studying. Our desire to become actors, playwrights, and screenplay writers is, not only to entertain ourselves, but to touch people's hearts as well; we want to touch them emotionally. As one of the screenplay writers I recently read said, "That's why we spread our bile and blood across the screen, so we can touch people."

I also think there is another part of it that goes beyond that. You want to touch them in the right way, and you have a hopeful message to give them. That's what I go, hopefully, a message of truth and power. Some people never look beyond the entertainment. There are the ones that do get the deeper message, though. I think, subliminally, the others do too. That's the part of theater I love—beyond it being a collaborative medium where people

come together and you form something new, creative, beautiful, and, hopefully, true. You see your baby come to life.

What screenplay are you currently working on?

I'm working on three. One is The Emma Nevada Show. I'm calling it *The Nightingale* because that was one of the names Emma Nevada was known by. She is one of the most wonderful characters I've come across and has mesmerized me for years. When we first did the play, Piper's Opera House brought in a New York Theatre and Opera critic, Glenn Looney, to lecture on Emma. He was fascinated by her. It seems she inspired him in his profession. I gained so much information; I could write a miniseries on her and her family. They were a fascinating family.

The other screenplay I'm writing is called *The Scam*. It's set in modern day New York. It is about an Internet scam on older women and involves 9/11 and the war in the East.

Then, a third one that I'm working on—I don't know if it's going to be a screenplay or a novel—is sort of a collection of memories and experiences I have had. I call it *Marta*. They say, before you approach any producer, you need at least fifteen screenplays in your pocket.

Can you estimate how much time you have spent on just one screenplay?

If you include all the research, I would say it varies. There are some people that are very prolific. With me, it has been six years since I became fascinated with Emma, but I'm just getting started on the screenplays this year. I know there are tons of rewrites to do. You have to be the kind that never gives up and never takes no for an answer. [laughs]

Has translating the Emma Nevada play into a screenplay been difficult?

At first I didn't know how to do it, but basically, the screenplay is separate from the play. They are two different entities because the play is a narrative, and I want the screen to be more that. I want the audience to experience it, and it's more dramatized.

We talked about the Public Access show you did a little bit in the last session, but I want to go into that a little more. I've actually been able to watch a few of the episodes. Can you tell me how the idea came about and what you had to do to get it started?

It was basically started by the Theater Coalition, which is no longer in existence. The Theater Coalition was part of the Lear Theater Organization; they wanted to bring all the community theaters in the area together and help them have a reasonable space for to perform. They also wanted to provide them with resources and advertisement, because advertisement is everything and costs a lot. That's when they put *Curtain Call* on Community Access TV.

Their funding ran out and they sort of broke up. I thought it was too good of an idea and too valuable to the community, not only for the theater groups, but for the people that wanted to go and see these performances. It not only included theater, but all the orchestras and operas as well. For anything that was being performed in the community, you could go to *Curtain Call* and find out when it was, what the ticket prices were, and maybe get a little sample of it or interview with the performers.

My hostess or emcee, Nettie Oliverio is fabulous because she is so good at what

she does and so knowledgeable about the art community. She's so good with people; she just brings out the best in them. My cameraman, Ron Allen, was always very eager to do what he could do, so, basically, I had very little to do. I was a member of Community Access TV, so I said that I would sponsor the program. I bought the materials for it, helped set up the stage, did the editing for a while, and it turned out that it eventually ran itself.

On one that I saw, you interviewed multiple people. How did you find people?

Well, once they knew that there was somebody available that could give them free advertisement, they contacted us. So, we just sort of picked and chose where we were going to interview. Sometimes we would do two shows at a time and sometimes we only had enough to do one hour-long show.

Tell me about the format of the show.

The format was Nettie interviewing the conductor, the actors, or the singers and asking them to speak about the event that was coming up, or to give a little sample of it. Sometimes they would sing. Other times they would do a little preview of the performance. We always had information for the public on where they could get tickets and how much it was.

How often did you film and how many shows were produced?

We would film at least once a month, depending on how many events were coming up and which groups we had to interview. I don't know how many were produced. The

show was on for several years. At times, we would film two shows on the same day.

Would you have more than one a month?

Sometimes we did, yes.

How many years did you work on the show, and when was the show on?

Time all blends together for me, but I'd say it was 1997 to 2010. That's including when the Coalition had it. I was most active from 2000 to 2003.

What was it like working with CINCAT and producing your own show?

I really like CINCAT, and it's such a shame it has lost its funding. It's not active right now. I'm hoping, as the economy gets better, we will get another Community Access television station. It is so important, and I would like to see more people take advantage of it. They had classes that taught you how to film and how to run the board, which, during our time, went from videotape to cassettes, to CDs or DVDs. They also had a class to teach you how to edit your program. The people that want to get their information out to the public can do so in a reasonable way. It's a part of our freedom of speech. Let's hope it will become active again in the future.

Can you recall any memorable guests, interviews, or presentations?

Oh, there were so many of them. I really enjoyed when they would perform for us. We had a group from Gold Hill Theater; between Virginia City and Silver City there is the Gold

Hill Hotel and they have a theater. They put on performances during the summer.

They came in and did this skit where the chef was there, but another actor had the chef's hands while the chef was demonstrating how to cook something. It was just hysterical. With one actor that can't see the work they're doing with the hands and the other one trying to explain what she was doing, it was a comedy. We had the performers and the singers—Tumbleweed Tex and C.C. Gable. Those are personal friends of mine along with Carolyn Wray from the TMCC theatre departments. They do marvelous work.

The local theaters are really hurting. The Nevada Repertory Company is not going to be funded anymore, so you're not going to have it. Hopefully the university will bring that back, because it has been a wonderful source of training for people that want to be in theater. It has been a source of entertainment for the community as well. I also know that Western Community College is going to give up its Music Theater Department, which is such a shame.

So, Truckee Meadows Community College is the only one that's still surviving. There are also some local community theatres. One of them is Reno Little Theater which has been here for a very long time. They had their own building downtown on Sierra Street for years. When Circus Circus came in, they wanted to buy the whole block for their parking lot. I wish they would have left that little corner building of the theater there, but they didn't. They're trying to build a theater off Wells Avenue, and they're coming along well with the project. They actually made money last year which is a big thing for a community theater. There are some others that come and go, but that's one

of the big mainstays. It's like Piper's Opera House being one of the oldest active opera houses in the country. We need to keep these treasures. They are treasures for Nevada.

How receptive was the Reno cultural community to the Curtain Call show?

I would get feedback and it would surprise me because I didn't think it had that wide of an audience. I would get various comments or they would say they saw a performance. People would say, "Oh, I saw that on CINCAT." So, there actually were a lot of people. I don't know if they were just surfing the channels and stopped to watch, or if they actually tuned in and made a point to find out when it was. Hopefully, they did. We probably got a bit of both, if you are talking about the general public as the cultural community. The arts groups loved us.

Do you think that the show was successful in what it was trying to accomplish?

I think it was successful because it gave a way for organizations to get the word out that they were having a performance. Our town took advantage of this, because we have a lot of art in the community and I don't want to see it disappear; I really don't. We have so much more to offer than gambling and divorce. Of course, the divorce capital is no more, but in the 1930s and 1940s, that's what we were known as— the town of broken hearts. So, it is such a wonderful thing to bring people in. Sparks and Reno have been trying to bring people with other interests into the community with river races, rafting, farmer's markets, and Hot August Nights.

What sort of expenses did you have in terms of putting the show on?

There was paying our performers; we paid, even if it was a stipend. There was also renting the space or sharing the profits with a nonprofit from the performance. We quite often split the house with Piper's Opera House or Brewery Arts Center in Carson City. There were costumes and traveling expenses, and most of the performers were willing to pay that expense in the production, but you still have to get the props over there. Props are another thing you have to buy. So, costumes, props, and transportation were all expenses.

You also have to have a space. We were always very lucky, but you have to have a space to rehearse. The community was supportive of us. The Amway Distributors in Sparks gave us a space to store all our props and costumes free of charge, because they could write it off. That was in the Roundhouse in Sparks, which has a history all of its own. I think it should be restored and made into a shopping center.

I've forgotten there are also advertising and ticket sales. Also, you would have to pay the state for your nonprofit organization. You don't have taxes, but you have to pay for your license. You have to keep your nonprofit up.

When did the Theater Coalition come about and how were you involved in it?

It was probably around 1997. There is a Christian Science church downtown by the river. It's a historical building built by a famous architect. I believe the architect's last name is Washington. The Christian Science church was building a new church and wanted to sell the building to someone who would preserve it, so Moya Lear took up the task. She wanted it to become the Lear Theater.

The goal was to raise money for the renovations to change it from a church

into a theater. They had a large committee, and Sparks Little Theatre was invited to be involved at a certain point—as were all the theater groups—but it still has not been converted. There has been a lot of money raised, but, in my opinion, it went to too many “how to” studies.

So, it still sits there. I understand that Shanda, Moya’s daughter, is still hoping that it will become a theater one day. They started the Theater Coalition and *Curtain Call* to promote their fundraising efforts in the community and to say “we have a need for this theatre because we have theatre groups that don’t have a place to perform.” That’s how I see the Theatre Coalition got started.

Were there any other things they were working on, or was it just a meeting of different theater groups?

Our part of the meetings was about bringing together mailing lists, free advertising, and resources to share. They were also trying to bring theater groups to work together. For instance, if there were props or costumes that one company had and that another company could use, they could borrow or rent them from each other. It happened up to a certain point, and then they decided, for one reason or another, that they didn’t have the money to do it and they closed everything down as well as *Curtain Call*.

So, I sponsored the show changing the name to *City Stages* because one of their cameramen had copyrighted the name *Curtain Call*, but it was still the same format in that we were offering information for local performing groups to advertise their performances for free.

How receptive to the Theater Coalition were the different theater groups?

Initially, they were very excited, but they lost interest after a while. Also— this really kind of surprised me—there was a spirit of competition between the groups, which helped to break it up as well. There was plenty of audience to go around.

Who are some of the local people that you’ve worked with in Reno, who are a part of this broader theater community?

We worked with Reno Little Theater and Gothic North, which is no longer in existence, Sparks Little Theatre, Truckee Meadows Community College, Fun Time Players—basically any performing arts group that contacted us.

We tried to include the people in Virginia City, Carson City, and the surrounding areas like Fallon, but they weren’t very active with us.

How would you describe the theater community in Reno?

Enthusiastic. The most active one, which is downtown and has a building of its own, is Bruka Theater. They have really done quite a job of keeping it alive. They do very avant-garde performances, which is fantastic. They go out and get the funding, which is marvelous. They have some great performers as well.

You get everyone from every walk of life in the theater community, and that’s what you want because it is community theater. If people had a place to perform that was reasonably priced, it would be more active and a lot more people would be involved. It can cost you \$400 a night to rent any theater, and that’s actually reasonable.

I’d say there is an enthusiasm here. Like I said, Bruka has done a good thing because

they have established a theater and it's a place where people know they can go for theater. If they like that kind of theater, it's there. They're alive and surviving, so you know there's an interest in theater.

Reno Little Theater has performed in a high school theater for several years now while they've been trying to get their theater built. It's very close to being completed, which is wonderful. Maybe that will become another venue where people will be able to perform different playwrights. They're more of traditional stock... plays.

TMCC has a wonderful Musical Theater Department. The Reno Repertory Company of UNR was also very good. It brought in *Sondheim* and all sorts of different plays. You have a wonderful space there. I hope you don't lose it.

Have there been any general changes, trends, or shifts in theater in Reno over the years?

The economy really has always been a big issue with theater groups, and with it being on a downhill climb for a while, it has really hit them hard.

We have groups that have theater for children. We also give classes for teens. That's what you want to do; you want to keep people interested and get more people involved. It's a big chunk of time out of your life to give. It's six weeks' rehearsal and usually two to three weeks' performances. So, it's a big part of your life you're giving to the community, and to do all that, you want to have an audience there to enjoy it.

I want to ask you about the Poetry Society that you told me about last week. What was the organization's official name?

Nevada Poetry Society.

Can you tell me about the organization and how you got involved?

I have a dear friend who was a great writer, poet, and playwright. Her name was Gloria Oberg, and she recently passed away. We were in acting class together and became friends. One day she said, "Oh, you should join the poetry society. I've been a member for a long time."

I said, "Well, I don't think I can write poetry."

Then, she said, "Oh, yes, you can write poetry. We have classes."

That's how I got involved. She also invited a couple of our other friends. They would meet once a month and they would give you an assignment to explain the structure of a certain type of poetry, like a haiku or some traditional rhyming scheme. They have all these different names for the different forms of poetry. What I do is free verse, basically. I've done others, but my favorite is just to write free verse. I think it was from 1995 to 1997 that I was active with the group.

During that time, we put a poetry calendar together so we could be published and it could go out to the community. We distributed it to different stores that were selling Nevada-made articles. It was quite profitable, but there was contention within the group because it created work. You had to work to get it out and distributed.

Even though it was a profitable activity, they didn't want to spend the time doing it. I think there was also some contention among the members because we had a committee that you submitted your poetry to, and if the committee liked the poem, but they wanted to change something, they had the right to do it. We are not talking about drastic changes here—like a word or two. Some of

the poets didn't necessarily appreciate that, but they were being published at the same time.

Anyway, we had two issues come out of the Nevada Poetry Calendar, but I'm very proud to have been a member of that and to have helped that happen.

You mentioned your friend Gloria. Who are some of the other people involved in that group with you?

Shirley Shock-Hogg was my *Madame Butterfly* in the Piper's Opera House production. There was Sam Woods, who was the president; Winnie Sapira; Thelma Brown-Ireland; Shirley Fleming; Rhonda Margaret Hayne; Sister Margaret McCarran; Phyllis Kaser; Beth Jacobs; Helen Louis Chadwick; Dina Barnett; Yvonne Isola; Eva Morris; Paul Carlisle Ramsey; and Ruth Matz. Those are some that were involved.

Who did the calendar layout?

My girlfriend Shirley Shock-Hogg did layout. I was working for A. Carlisle's stationery company at the time and borrowed a binding machine. Once we had the layout, it went to the printer who printed it on hard-stock paper. Then we took and bound it in spiral-bound with the binding machine for the first round. Then, we made so much money, the next time we just had the publisher bind it. We had most of the layout already done, so it was a lot easier the second time. If it had a chance to grow, it would have become easier and easier as it was produced.

Where did you have meetings?

In various places. They would meet in schools, lunchrooms, people's homes, or

at the library. It just varied. It's just like the screen playwright's critique group I'm involved with. We're meeting at the Claim Jumper. [laughs]

What were some of the accomplishments or fond memories you had during the time you were involved with the poetry group?

Well, it was wonderful to discover that I could write. It opened a whole new world to me. I am also very proud of the calendar that I helped to make possible. On top of that, some of my poems have been published. My mother always loved poetry and to accomplish that was great.

MARGO DANIELS

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Margo Daniels: I was born in Connersville, Indiana, which is a little town in Southeast Indiana halfway between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Indianapolis. I was the second eldest of seven children. My father owned his own business. My mother was Director of Fayette County Welfare from the time I was in high school until she retired at the age of 75.

I went to St. Gabriel's Catholic School for elementary school, Connersville Senior High School, and graduated from St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. I also went to Columbia University for grad school in New York briefly.

I left there, joined the Peace Corps, and met my husband, Pera. We were assigned to the Philippines. We were there for two years. When I came back from the Peace Corps, we lived in San Francisco, where our first child, Julie, was born. Then, since my husband worked for the federal government, we moved to the [Washington] D.C. area and lived in

northern Virginia. I got my master's degree in library and information science at Catholic University.

Our second child, Christy, was born in Virginia and Michael was born in D.C. We lived there for thirty-five years, and then we moved to Reno when we both retired.

Do you remember if there were any cultural activities in the schools you attended?

Oh, yes. We had them all. In grade school, I played in the orchestra. I played the violin. I was in every dramatic production St. Gabriel's had. My mother and father were very involved with the CYO, Catholic Youth Organization, and we had a play contest every year, usually in Indianapolis. They were very involved in that. They were always directing the plays or doing scenery or costumes.

In high school, I was in the marching band and played the French horn. I have sung all my life in church choirs. I was part of a chorus in grade school, and in high school I sang alto in a sextet and I sang in the high school

chorus. I was also in Strut and Fret, which was our drama club. I think I served twice as vice president of the Thespian Society, which was the actors' honor society.

In college, I sang in madrigals and the college chorus and was in a number of productions at St. Mary's, Notre Dame. I also worked in the theater behind the scenes, doing lighting, costumes, and stage sets. All my life I've been involved with both music and drama, which has been very important.

Now, art is a whole different ball game in terms of being artistic in the sense of painting things. At OLLI, I tried watercolors. I just don't have an eye for it. I envy people who do; I do not. I love going to art galleries, though. We've been members of the Nevada Museum of Art ever since we moved here. So, that's about it. I now sing with the Reno Phil[harmonic] Chorus.

I also have this very vivid memory, and some day I really want to write the whole story of it. When we were kids, I was the only girl for about eleven years, so my four brothers and I would play Robin Hood out in the coal house that was behind our house. I hated being the only girl because I had to be Maid Marian, and Maid Marian was nothing. She never did anything; she just stood around and waited for Robin to take care of her. So, I wouldn't do it; I had to be one of the others. Since I towered over my brothers until they finally grew, I was Little John and I loved it. It was perfect.

Did you ever consider pursuing theater or music professionally?

Oh, absolutely. In high school I was absolutely crushed when the great Helen Hayes was brought to Connersville. She was doing a show in Cincinnati one summer and, somehow or other, our drama coach got her to come to Connersville. Those of us who

were involved in Strut and Fret got to meet her. We had a picnic up at the park. It was just wonderful.

She talked to all of us and we did little skits for her we had prepared. She was very kind, I thought. She gave lots of good pointers, but to me she merely said, "My dear, you realize you're quite too tall for the stage." That was kind of crushing to me, but she was right. I towered over all the leading men. That's why, most of the time in high school, I played character roles. It was the only thing I could play—no romance roles there. You live with it and go on to do something else, that's fine. At the moment, though, it was quite crushing.

It was definitely something that mattered very, very much to me, and my parents were really incredible in that regard, because during the Depression, the Chautauqua came to Connersville every summer. My parents loved it. Following that, the Humanities Department in Ohio gave grants to the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and some of the Cincinnati Playhouse people to go to local towns, such as ours, and perform. It was called the Community Concert Series, and my parents bought season tickets for as long as I can remember it happening. My parents encouraged us musically. It was very much a part of their lives too. Both my parents were musical. They both played the violin. My mother played the piano beautifully. She also sang. So, yes it was a big part of our lives.

What were your undergrad studies at St. Mary's?

I was an English literature major and French minor. In those days, firms actually came to colleges to recruit, and they liked coming to places like St. Mary's. It was all women. That's how I got a job at Random House as a junior editor when I first went to New York.

That sounded so wonderful. I was so excited. I couldn't wait to go, but reality sets in very quickly. You get paid very little, and most of the other young women that I was working with at Random House were being taken care of by their parents and I couldn't ask my parents for help, mainly because I was the second oldest. They still had five more to put through college. My older brother and I both had college scholarships, but it was important to my folks that everybody go.

So, I didn't last very long at Random House. I got a job at Columbia University as a secretary which paid for my grad school as well as my living expenses, so it worked out fine.

What did you study at Columbia?

Comparative literature. It was fascinating because I only knew one language besides English—French. You could read the things in Spanish or German, though, and then have a simultaneous translation on the screen. These were old machines. Boy, wouldn't they laugh at them now, but that's what I did.

It was wonderful. We had some fabulous instructors at Columbia, as you can imagine. They had so much to draw from there. James Reston, who was the drama critic for *The New York Times* at the time, taught a drama class which I took. It just was a wonderful experience all the way around. I didn't get my degree. I didn't get a master's from there, but I was there for about two years, so it was great.

What was it about literature that you enjoyed studying?

Mainly, I think you learn more about other cultures. Now, my older brother is a historian. He taught college history for many years. We always have this argument. I don't believe you

find out from history about the culture of a people, but you sure find it out when you read the books that were written about a period of time, especially if the author knows what he's talking about and does his own research. You look at the literature that's been given to us, and it just explains so much about the way people lived and about the things they most enjoyed or didn't like at all. Very often it's novels that lead you to find out more. I can understand why people go to war [from reading literature] much more than I can understand it from dry history.

Of course, he claims that he doesn't write dry history, and I agree. There are some fabulous history books too. When my husband and I went through the Panama Canal, three or four years ago, I took David McCullough's book with me about the Panama Canal. It's a 480-page book, but it was wonderful. It was a great read and told the history beautifully.

I've always been interested in people. I'm a real people person. When I was at St. Mary's studying literature, I had not been anywhere except Indiana. I was born and raised there, and my grandparents and both sides of the family were there. We had no reason to go to any other place.

I was a great reader, though, and by reading Charles Dickens, I knew London up one side and down the other. I also knew the outlying areas because a lot of his books are set elsewhere in England. I fell in love with [Leo] Tolstoy. I think I spent a whole six months devouring every Russian novel I could get my hands on. It just seemed to me that the world suddenly became mine because I could read about it, and that mattered very much to me.

When the opportunity to join the Peace Corps came along, I thought, "This is what I've wanted all my life, to go someplace else." Of course, by that time, I considered being in New York as going to a foreign country because, in many ways, it was for me.

Did you meet your husband in the Peace Corps?

We did, yes. We were both volunteers and we got married in the Philippines. It was a wonderful, fantastic experience. Not everybody had such an experience. As a matter of fact, we were in Philippines Group One, the first group to go to Asia. We started dating during our training at Penn State, and by the time we got on the plane to go to the Philippines, I think both of us knew this was something really special, but nothing had been said. That was fifty years ago this October.

The Peace Corps is having a celebration in Washington, D.C. this September for the fifty years of the Peace Corps. We are going. As a special thing just for Group One, Philippines, we put together a book, which we just finished. The name of it is *Answering Kennedy's Call*. We were all asked to write something for it and, of course, I did.

I've always said it's difficult for us to separate the Peace Corps experience from our own personal experience of meeting, falling in love, getting married there, and spending the first year of our married life in the Philippines.

Great stories. We had wonderful times and it was really just a magnificent experience for me. In reading some of the stories that other people put in, I realized others were so disappointed by many things, but we weren't disappointed by anything because we had each other. There were lots of other reasons too. The Peace Corps in 1961 was, well...you rolled with the punches, and that's pretty much what we did, so it was magnificent for us.

You certainly learn the culture of another country when you live in a little *barrio* with no electricity and other things we have in the states. You find out you don't miss those things; what you miss, for example, is having

a real conversation about what's going on in Washington, D.C.

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred while we were in the Philippines, and we were completely cut off. We had no idea what was going on in the world. One of the magnificent things about Filipinos, which we never understood, was they knew; they were the ones who told us we were being evacuated because of the Cuban Missile Crisis. We didn't get the telegram telling us we might be evacuated for two more days. How did they know? We never did figure that out. They're wonderful. The Philippines have a saying, *Bahala Na!*, which means, "Well, maybe. Who knows."

We went back to visit in 1986. We took a ferry to the site where we lived after we were married. I was given a schedule of when the ferry was going to leave. Of course, we American types were down there on the dock at nine-thirty waiting for the ferry. We couldn't understand why nobody else was there, because it had been mobbed when we took it over the night before. Well, they arrived at a quarter to twelve because the ferry arrived at noon; we had been sitting there for two and a half hours by that time. So, they're just magnificent people. I don't know how they do it, but they're incredible.

Can you tell me about your career in library information and science?

When we first came back from the Philippines, I taught, since overseas we taught English, ESL [English as a Second Language] classes [in the Peace Corps]. A lot of the school systems were so desperate for teachers in the early 1960s, that they waived whatever requirements you really needed in education. So, I taught English and I liked it. It was really fun, but when our daughter, Julie, started high

school, she didn't like the fact that everybody knew who her mother was. All the teachers would say, "Oh, yes, you're Margo's little girl." She didn't like that. She wanted to be totally anonymous.

So, I said to my husband, "Maybe I should think about doing something else."

I have a very dear friend who still lives in Washington, D.C., and she said to me, "You know what, Margo? You really ought to be a librarian. You love to read. You love kids; you love people. Do it."

So I thought, "Oh, why not?" So, that's why I did it and never looked back. I started as a children's librarian, which I loved dearly. I told stories and I, along with other staff members, arranged all kinds of wonderful programs. Every summer we would have a reading program, and it was usually one of those around-the-world cultural things where they would learn something about every country, because that was always important to me.

You know the old Peter Principle, though. They liked what I was doing, and suddenly I became the head of reference. Then, suddenly I became a branch manager. Then, suddenly I was promoted to be in administration. Really, most of the time, I was a manager or supervisor of people, which I loved. One of the things I'm most proud of is mentoring so many others who have done very well. It just pleases me every time I pick up the newsletter from Fairfax County Public Libraries that somebody I knew years ago under my tutelage is now the head of a branch. I did like it. I do love working with the public.

There are some crazy things that happened too. We had a gay newspaper, *The Blade*, that was published in Washington, D.C., and I remember a young woman with two young children in tow storming into my office one day. She had driven all the way to the Admin

Building, which was very far away from most of the branches, demanding to know why I would allow *The Blade*, this "horrible" newspaper, to be on the newsstand where her three-year-old can see it. I was amazed. "Your three-year-old can read *The Blade*?" (I thought).

It was a lot of fun, though. I enjoyed it immensely. It's a good thing, because I did it for a long time. I became very active in the Virginia Library Association and the American Library Association, and because I've always loved children's books and have never gotten over that love, I served twice on the Newbery Committee for ALA [American Library Association]. It was really wonderful because that is the committee that chooses the Newbery books every year.

Which books won the years that you served?

One was *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, which is a book about the Nazis in Denmark during the war. The other one was *A View from Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg, which is a lovely book about kids who, sort of like one of our grandkids, are a little too smart for their own good and they don't quite fit in with the other kids. For example, it reminds me a lot of the kids who go to Davidson when I hear them talk about how they never quite fit in. Our oldest grandchild is just too smart for her own good, unfortunately, but I know some day it will all catch up with her; she'll be fine. It's hard to watch her sometimes, though. That was the basic story of *A View from Saturday* by Konigsburg.

They were wonderful opportunities for me, but I did all kinds of other things too. In the Virginia Library Association, for example, we noticed there were prizes for all kinds of books, but none for history or historical fiction, so we started the Jefferson Cup Award

which is still going strong. You look back on things like that and you feel really good. It was a good idea after all, so it was fun.

You mentioned that you came to Reno for retirement.

Well, we moved here. We hadn't really intended to come to Reno. My husband worked for the federal government and retired in 1994. I didn't retire until the end of 1997, so in January of 1998 we started looking for a place we'd like to live. At that time Michael and Missy, our son and his wife, were living in Minneapolis and we just adored Minneapolis, but neither of us wanted to live there in the wintertime. Besides, we didn't particularly want to live where they lived; that's just where they were.

Both Julie and Christy were living in California. Our oldest, Julie, got her master's in engineering and went to work for Hewlett Packard, so she's been in Roseville forever. At that time, Christy was in San Jose.

We didn't think Michael and Missy were going to stay in Minnesota, especially because Missy is a southerner and she really didn't like the winters there at all. We knew they'd move South eventually, and they did. They moved to Ocala, Florida where they now live. Christy, moved to the Denver area about nine or ten years ago.

In 1998, we were just looking, and, since my husband was raised in San Francisco, he really wanted to go back there. We both felt that we didn't want to spend all of our money on a house and then have nothing left. So, we decided that wasn't going to work.

We just started looking, and we came to Reno several times. Actually, when Julie was in graduate school in California, we came to Reno. We'd come out to visit her, and she was busy so wasn't with us all the time, so we

would come up to Reno and just look around. We knew the town. At the time, we thought it was just a shame they didn't do anything with the [Truckee] river. What's the matter with these people? Why can't they put something—well, they have now.

We decided to try it. We rented a house for a year and a half and we fell in love with the people we met. We joined everything under the sun and met a lot of wonderful people, but we particularly fell in love with the university. I joined the Symphonic Chorus the first year we lived here, and then we got tickets to the [Reno] Philharmonic, the [Nevada] Opera, and the Ballet [Nevada].

What really summed it all up for us was when we had been here three months and had tickets to the symphony one Tuesday night. We drove downtown, had dinner, drove over to Pioneer Center [for the Performing Arts], parked the car on the street, walked into the Pioneer Center, and realized we'd left the tickets at home. Well, we used to go to the Kennedy Center, where, if you left your tickets at home, forget it. You went out and drank all night because you wouldn't have time to get home and back, and besides, there was no parking.

So Pera says to me, "I'll go get the tickets." It never occurred to us to say anything to anybody because you certainly wouldn't do that in Washington. So, he went back home, got the tickets, drove back, parked the car in the same place where it was before, and we got into our seats before it started. We looked at each other and said, "Oh, this is our kind of town. This is wonderful." Everything about it was fabulous.

So, we said to the kids, "We're going to buy a house," and, of course, the two in California were thrilled. Michael was less so, but that's what we did and we've been here ever since. We never looked back. It was a really good decision.

Was there anything about Reno that surprised you, or do you remember any of your expectations of Reno at that time?

I had no idea that if you were over sixty-two—and believe me, both of us were well over sixty-two when we moved here—you could go to the university without paying for the classes, and that was a huge surprise. When I found that out, I immediately enrolled.

The other big surprise to me was I never had any idea of the Basque influence in Reno. I knew who the Basques were only because we'd been to Spain and France, but I had no idea they came to Reno. So, that's what I did. I took all the classes in Basque studies I could manage. I tried the language and that was a mess, so I didn't do that. I loved it, though, and thought it was even more important you could do it for free. I just couldn't get over that.

Then, the very first year we were here actually, we heard about ElderCollege. We joined ElderCollege and went to their business meeting in September. At that time, the president asked the few people who came to this business meeting if anybody could type. I went up to him afterwards and said, "Well, I can type. If you just need help typing, that's no problem."

What he actually needed was a newsletter editor, so I became the newsletter editor and I was hooked. We loved ElderCollege and have been with it ever since. I've been on the board since 1998, but this is going to be my last year. No more. It was great, though.

I wasn't terribly surprised Reno had a Senior Learning in Retirement program because we had one at the library in Fairfax County. I don't think I realized the extent that it would rule our lives the way it has, though. Now it's like we have jobs all over again. It's been wonderful, though.

I did a lot of research about Reno before we came here. I'm a librarian, after all, so I knew pretty much what was going on here. I was pleased about all the activities they had here. It surprised me a little bit about the theater, because we're not casino people and we never have been, even after living here for twelve years. So, we don't like to go to the casino shows. I was surprised, for example, that Reno Little Theater was at [Proctor R.] Hug High [School] and that the Bruka [Theater] had this rather messy interior. They do a good job, but it's amazing to me they can. I think the university does a wonderful job with their productions and we were quite pleased with that.

I guess you think of Reno and Las Vegas as big entertainment capitals, and I was really surprised that they didn't have a real *theater* theater here. Then, of course, we started contributing to the Moya Lear Theater, thinking that was going to answer all our [prayers] and that was a big disappointment.

I don't think there were too many other surprises, really. Those were big ones—the university and the Basques, and all that there is to do here.

Before we got as old as we are now, we did a lot of hiking and walking. That was wonderful here, not that we couldn't do that in Virginia. We did, and we loved Virginia. Virginia is a beautiful state. If you've ever been there, you know. It's just green, lush, and gorgeous, but it's different here. You get used to liking certain things here.

What is the mission of ElderCollege/OLLI?

The way the mission statement reads in our catalogues is that it provides intellectual stimulation and an opportunity to learn in retirement, as well as socialization. When we first joined ElderCollege, there were maybe

two hundred members. My husband and I are both very friendly people, so within the first year, we probably knew half of those two hundred people by their first names, and we liked that very much. It was small and intimate. We didn't agree with a lot of them politically, but I think, overall, we found them to be stimulating people—people we liked to have conversations with or go to dinner, theatre, and the symphony with.

When we became OLLI, we kept growing and growing. It was a very exciting concept that we were going to turn this little ElderCollege into a first-class organization. It's just been remarkable with the assistance of Extended Studies and what they've done for us in marketing and what we can offer by utilizing all the professors at UNR.

I have friends all over the country, and I mentioned Eric Rasmussen's name to somebody the other day on the telephone. She lives in Massachusetts, and she said, "Oh, yes, we know who he is," because he is a foremost Shakespeare scholar. People know him. It's really gotten to be very exciting.

When I look back, Eric Rasmussen was one of the very first UNR professors I met because I took his class at ElderCollege. It's been wonderful from that perspective. OLLI offers all kinds of stimulating things—physically as well as mentally. We have hiking and walking groups. We also have a travelers' group where we sit and talk about the trips we've been on. The really amazing thing is that I don't think there's anybody I've met and engaged in conversation with at OLLI that hasn't traveled somewhere. We are huge travelers. We just love to go. You name it; we'll go.

So, I think the basic mission of OLLI and ElderCollege has remained the same. The difficulty is the socialization part. We don't have a facility big enough to have all

thousand members come at the same time. This year in particular, we were a little upset because, generally speaking, when we had the registration process, people would come and we'd have doughnuts and coffee. We would have tables for the various interest groups like Great Books and mystery books, and we'd sit around and talk to people. Well, this year some of us decided we can't do that because, if we get more than 118 people in that room, we're violating fire code. So, we can't do that anymore. I fear a little bit for the socialization process.

Now, very often when people come early to class, they have a chance to socialize with each other, but some of these classes are getting so popular that we have them in Laxalt [Auditorium]. That's auditorium seating. You can't easily turn around and talk to people. So, I worry about that. I think, overall, the basic function of the two organizations has really remained the same, though.

Where it used to be that Esther Early [phonetic] and I could sit down and, in thirty minutes, come up with a whole list of great classes for people, we now have a Curriculum Committee of twenty people; it's a tremendous process. The president, Joyce Starling, and I are currently the co-chairs of Curriculum, and it takes us all semester to put together next semester. It's becoming a good bit of work in that sense, but I think we've been able to fulfill the mission pretty well so far. I do wonder how much bigger we will grow.

I wish we had an enormous building that was ours. When the Mathewson [-IGT Knowledge Center] was built, we immediately asked Shera Annunzio, "What are they doing with Getchell?" The problem with Getchell is that there's no parking there, and our people are not going to walk miles from a bus. So, it wouldn't have done us any good even if we'd gotten it.

I do understand there is [the potential for] underground parking there, if you wanted to use it. It's not parking now, but the basement is underground. It would all have to be retrofitted for earthquake damage and have a new driveway built in. It would cost a fortune, and we don't have that kind of money, even with the grants from the Osher Foundation. So, I don't know what we're going to do. I am worried that the Nelson Building may just fall down on our ears one of these days; the roof is awful and the university is not going to reroof that. They don't have the money. I don't know what's going to happen.

I think your question was what kind of a mission did OLLI have that appealed to us. Well, it was certainly the classes. Pera and I are both interested in the academic side of OLLI. You don't have to be, though. If all you want to do is hike and go on walks, you can do that, too. For us, though, it's the intellectual stimulation that is wonderful. For me in particular, I love the literature program.

Can you describe Lifescapes and how it began?

Lifescapes itself is not an OLLI program per se. Lifescapes was started by Julie Machado, who was program manager at the Northwest Library at the time, Stephen Tchudi, who was the head of the English Department at UNR, and Monica Grecu, who was part of the English Department faculty at UNR.

The idea was that, when seniors get to a certain age, they do a great deal of reflecting on their lives—the good, the bad, the ugly—and wouldn't it be wonderful to get people to write these things down? When they started the idea, they were looking at people in their nineties who had absolutely gone from one century to another. Of course, this was in the twentieth century they were doing it; they had gone from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

I remember asking my own mother once, "In your lifetime, what was the single most astonishing thing that happened that made life so much easier, better, or more fun?"

She said, "The telephone." The telephone? I mean, I never even knew the house without a telephone. I thought that was just remarkable. She didn't say computers, although she had one. She didn't say television, because she hated it. It was the telephone. When you think in those terms, I think Stephen, Julie, and Monica were absolutely right. We have stories to tell that our grandchildren will just not believe.

I remember three years ago, we were up at Ashland at the Shakespeare Festival when the cell phone rang and it was our grandson in Colorado. "Grandmom, I have to do this assignment. What was your favorite television show when you were young?"

I said, "Oh, Jackson, I hate to break this to you, but we didn't have television when I was young." [laughter]

"You didn't?"

"No, dear, we didn't."

So I think that was the idea [of Lifescapes]. The other part of it was that too many of us don't think to ask our mothers, fathers, and grandparents what it was like when they grew up or what kinds of things were different than the way we live now, and we regret it later.

That was certainly the case with Monica Grecu. Her mother had just died in Romania, and she just was heartbroken that she didn't know and would never know the history of certain things with her mother gone.

So, Stephen Tchudi, Julie Michado, and Monica Grecu decided they would create this program. I believe the university was originally going to fund it, but couldn't get funding, so Julie Machado offered to write a grant to the Nevada Humanities. They ended up funding the program, because if you're

going to write your memories, you should have the chance to publish them.

Certainly, with the partnership with the university, the Copy Center is how we print the books now. They can print things for us far cheaper than anywhere else we can find. The way it's set up is we do one anthology every year in the fall. We work on it and then it's printed in April or May.

Now, Lifescapes was basically a library program. They were offering the courses at the library and they would do one anthology a year. They would pick a theme and write on that theme. If you contributed an article, you got a free copy of the anthology.

The Northwest Library opened about six months after we moved here in 1998. I was up there one day checking out some books and I saw this notice about [Lifescapes], so I stopped in to see what it was about. Esther Early was in that first class. I understand she's done a lot of oral history. Esther wrote about December 6, 1941, a day that will live in infamy. That was one of the first anthologies the Lifescapes people did. I believe that was in 2000.

Anyway, I bought one of the books because they had them sitting there, and I thought, "Well, it was for a good cause even if I know nothing about this" In this anthology, some of the pieces were very good, some of them were [demonstrates so-so], and some of them were downright dreadful, but they were in there.

I thought, wow, that sounds like a really neat thing to do. So, in 2001 I went to the class they had at Northwest. It was a big year for us because we traveled a lot to the East Coast again and we also went to China. So, I really wasn't active at all in Lifescapes then.

In 2002, we had a reading at OLLI engineered by Esther, who was very involved in Lifescapes. She just loved the whole

thing, and she wanted to have a program where people read from what they wrote. I might have been on the committee; I don't remember, but the day came and my husband, Pera, and I both went.

There was a gentleman there who had written about the first time he had ever danced, but he had a voice-box and couldn't read. He wanted somebody to read it for him, so Esther came over to me and said, "Will you read this for him?"

I got up and I read it. It was a charming little story about the first time he'd ever danced with a girl—not terribly well written—but just sweet.

Afterwards, Esther said to me, "That's a program we ought to have here at ElderCollege, don't you think?"

"Yes. I think so, Esther. You're a bigwig in Lifescapes. Talk to Julie and Dr. Tchudi and see if we can have it here."

She talked to them and, of course, came back to me and said, "Well, yes, we can do it, but you have to do it with me."

So, that's how it started. Esther and I started with five people; that's all we could get. They were all men writing about their World War II experiences. One of them was totally blind. He lived in Tanamera and would dictate what he remembered to a woman who lived down there and she would type it for him. It was wonderful. He did such a great job.

Anyway, they each did their own individual book. That was not put in an anthology. That was something I didn't know anything about. You can write your own book and get it published; it's all part of the program.

So in 2002 and 2003 we did that, and then we offered it at ElderCollege after that. Esther and I did it for about three years, from 2003 to 2005. Then Sherl Landers-Thorman, who teaches Lifescapes at Redfield, became my co-leader. This was before we used Redfield. We

did it for a couple of years together—probably right up until the time we became OLLI. Then, for about three years, I did it by myself, and now Joyce Starling and I are doing it together. That's how Lifescapes started at ElderCollege/OLLI.

Now, the difference is that, at the libraries, they don't care whether you come every other week or not. You can drop in, which we would find difficult at OLLI because of the capacity of the room where we hold class. At OLLI, Lifescapes is a pre-registration class and we ask that you as a class member are committed to coming. We don't demand that you do your homework every time, and we don't demand that you read anything you've written, but since we do a short story reading at every class, we need to know how many are coming so we can design our class accordingly. I am a literature person and I want the short stories we read in class to reflect the best I can find, not just anything in print. The idea is that reading good literature will assist in writing well and listening well to one another is key to what Lifescapes is all about."

So, we read the short story. Then, the class has twenty minutes to write on some facet of that story. For example, one of our greatest successes—this just happened a couple of years ago—was when I read a story about a woman who was going to a wedding in the South and wearing pantyhose. She got a tick inside her pantyhose while she was driving. She had to stop the car and get out and get rid of that tick, but, of course, in the process, she's loosening the pantyhose because she's twisting and turning and pulling. Finally, the tick leaves, she gets back in the car, and they go to the wedding. Of course, she walks into the wedding and her pantyhose are falling down.

Anyway, it was a very cute story by a woman who writes for the *Constitution*

Journal in Atlanta; it was very culturally-real for that part of the world.

So, the guys in the class said, "We are not writing about pantyhose."

I said, "Yes, you are. You've got fifteen minutes. Write." Well, when the fifteen minutes were up, who do you think had their hands up first to read about pantyhose? It was all the guys. [laughs] They all had stories about pantyhose. It's a great kind of a tag. You have something to latch on. You sit there and you think, "Well, I don't wear pantyhose. How can I possibly—?" Well, if you sit there long enough, it'll come to you.

You asked me, when you were here before, how memory really works. Memory starts with perception. If you don't perceive it, then you wouldn't have anything stored in either short-term or long-term memory that would allow you to write about it. So, you give them prompts, and out of those prompts come a story.

As the classes have gone on now, Joyce and I have two classes at OLLI at the Nelson Building, because suddenly we had forty-five students. There's no way you can have that many students sitting around a table and let everybody read what they've written. So, now we have two classes [at the Nelson Building] and there's also one at Redfield.

The whole idea is to get seniors to share their memories and the unique experiences they have had. It's just remarkable, really, and the connections you make are there constantly. It's a sensory kind of thing; you get them to think about the smells of Christmas or the feel of their Aunt Maggie's fur coat. That kind of thing will get them started.

We do not teach the craft of writing. We hope that, by reading the short stories and hearing the way authors have crafted sentences together, the class benefits from listening. There are certainly some students

who get it right away. There are some people who write beautifully. There are other people who write beautifully, whether memoir or not. But it doesn't really matter to us [if it's true] memory or not. We want people to be engaged. We want them to be stimulated. We want them to use their brains.

Some say, "I can't remember." Well, I think history has shown us that you can remember. It's a matter of having enough stimuli in a row to trigger that memory to come back out of your memory bank. That's what we try to do every time we have class.

I love it; I just adore it. Unfortunately, because I am the facilitator and have to come up with what we do every time we have class, I don't do much writing myself, which I regret. On the other hand, so many of the people in the class have had such tragedies in their life and I haven't. I'm the Pollyanna. I'm the one who had a wonderful childhood and a wonderful life. I have a wonderful husband. Nobody ever beat me up. Nobody ever did anything to me. So, it's just as well. I think people get tired of hearing me say, "Well..."

At any rate, I think that covers how I got into it and what we try to do. Anybody who contributes a story to the anthology gets one free book. If you write your own book totally, you get five copies. After that, you have to make a contribution to the Lifescapes program, rather than purchase them because we don't sell them at OLLI. That's how it works.

How often do the Lifescapes classes meet?

We meet six times each fall semester and seven or eight times each spring semester; it's generally every-other Tuesday. Now that we have two classes, we have the first and third Tuesdays from nine-thirty to eleven-thirty and the second and fourth Tuesdays from nine-thirty to eleven-thirty.

I didn't want to give them an assignment, because in the libraries they don't give assignments; you just arrive there. From what I understand now, since the librarians can't really participate, it's being done mostly by volunteers. They read their stories to each other and talk about them and that's it.

We definitely have a format, though. This year, for example, Joyce and I just sat down yesterday and mapped out the six classes we're going to have. Before each class, when they preregister, we call and tell them that they're either in the first and third or the second and fourth classes, and we also give them a quotation and ask them to write on that quotation and tie it into their life. This is, after all, a memoir-writing class. When they arrive that Tuesday morning, they should have something written.

The first thing we do is talk about what Lifescapes is about, because every year we have new people who've never done it before. We also have a lot of repeaters, though, and that's part of the reason why we've had to go to two classes. We generally tell them a little bit about what to expect, what we do, and what we don't do. We also have a lot of handouts to give them.

About four years ago, when I started doing it by myself, I found the Gotham Writers' Workshop in New York City. They have a beginning and an advanced memoir-writing class. Somehow or other, I got their eight lessons on how to write memoirs. The first one is on what a memoir is. The second one is on the different types of memoir you can write. Finally, you get into what is really important in memoir writing, and that is the fact that you have to focus on one segment of your life. It's not an autobiography. We don't want to hear you were born at the beginning and you're still alive, amazingly. Focus on some part of your life; that's what a memoir is all about.

So, we used the Gotham writing workshop lessons which were wonderful. Everybody loved them. So, stupid me, I called the Gotham Writers' Workshop and they asked me "How did you get hold of those?"

They said, "No, you can't have the advance. No, you have to pay and take the class if you want—."

The class is 400-and-some-odd dollars. I thought, "I'm sure I could get OLLI to pay for one class and get those lessons," but it wasn't worth it.

The classes are very much orchestrated. The students read their assignments, then we read a story, then they write on that story. If there's time left—generally there is because we only give them fifteen minutes to write—they get to read what they've written.

One of the problems is that there are, of course, some really sad stories out there and we are a group of very empathetic people. Sometimes, the class devolves into a catharsis session, and I don't want that. That's not what we're there for. On the other hand, you can't really stop that dynamic from happening.

One of the things we've discovered is that, after one or two meetings, a class culture begins to develop all by itself. Sometimes we can orchestrate it in a way, but many times it just happens. Suddenly, people want to hear more about the man who abused you and they want to hear more about what a terrible life you had.

We have one person in the class, a dear friend of mine, whose father left when she was about nine years old. Her mother had no means of support and the father didn't support them. She wrote this beautiful story about going to a fair and her mother reaching into her pockets and pulling out what turned out to be the last ten cents she had in her pocket and buying popcorn for them.

The next day her mother couldn't get out of bed, so this little girl went to the apartment

next door to get help. They took the mother to the Health Department and it turned out she had tuberculosis, so they took the child. The girl did not see her mother again. They just took her away to the Police Department, who then put her with Social Services, but she didn't see her mother for fifteen years.

That struck a chord. Everybody just [gasps]. They wanted to talk about it; they wanted to talk about tuberculosis and what it did to people in those years. All of a sudden, you're just all over the planet. That happens a lot. There are people who come to that class looking for that kind of support and understanding, so you can't dismiss it altogether, but you want to get them back on track if you can.

There's another woman whom I dearly love, but she can't read her stories without crying. I finally said, "Then stop writing such sad stories. Surely there's something else in your life." She's doing much better now. You run into all kinds of problems that way.

I think meeting every-other-week gives people something to really look forward to. They're very good about doing their assignments, which just tickles me to death because we advertise at OLLI, "No homework, no tests." Then, here we are saying, "What? You didn't do your assignment?" I think the every-other-week thing works out very well.

Have you found tried-and-true tricks to get people back on track or do you have to take it as it comes up?

It's sort of the roll-with-the-punches business again. I taught storytelling and library science courses at the University of Virginia Extension. So, I've taught enough that I can sort of tell when some people are getting fed up, even though one or two people are still hammering in the same subject. You

can begin to gently guide them away from that.

On the other hand, I have no compunction about saying, “We’ve discussed this ad nauseam. Let’s move on.” I do say that, and they can deal with that.

I have talked to people individually, like the woman who kept crying, for instance. I finally said to her, “Come on. We spend most of the time waiting for you to blow your nose. There are lots of other people in this class too.” She was very understanding about it, really.

On the other hand, I do think we always need to get back to the fundamentals of memoir writing, which are focus, telling the story, and being concise. Hemingway is a master of telling things in a very brief manner. One year I had them read one of Hemingway’s short stories and I said, “Now, you write on the same subject. Write the same story, but write it the way you would normally write it.” These went on for pages and pages because you just want to put everything in it. You don’t have to. Readers can [infer] a lot of things.

There’s a certain amount of teaching that goes on, but we are called facilitators, not teachers. I do remind people of that when they ask me to critique their work, because they don’t really want me to critique it. They want me to tell them it’s wonderful. So, if you start telling them what you really think, they get a little upset.

There’s really a very fine line, and when I edit the pieces for these anthologies, I never put a piece in edited unless [the author] has had a chance to look at it first, and they know that. Now they’re a little more understanding about it because I always give them a chance to write it their way.

Aside from really understanding what a memoir is and learning how to focus on a segment of your life, the other important thing to learn in Lifescapes is to not be afraid

to write something that not everybody will agree with. A lot of people just want to please the other members of the class, and that really defeats the purpose. We work on that quite a bit too.

What specific exercises or assignments do you give the class?

First of all, we use the five senses. We say, “Let’s start with smells,” because that was probably the most successful one we did last year. “Think about the sense of smell and what happens to you. Around Christmastime, for example, do you walk into a store that has potpourri and it suddenly reminds you of the way your house smelled or didn’t smell, as the case may be? Did you mother make fruitcakes? Was it the brandy that turned you on or off? Think about something in the sense of smell that would trigger a memory very powerful to you and write about it.”

Now, the biggest problem I had last year with this was getting them to be succinct. I said, “Let’s all spell the word, s-u-c-c-i-n-c-t. Please, keep it succinct.” Some of them were better at that than others. Some want to put everything in but the kitchen sink.

So, using the senses is one of the things. The other thing we did was have them find an object in their house that is very precious to them and tell us why. A lot of them, amazingly, had to do with cooking. “This was my grandmother’s bread pan. I remember being there visiting her and I couldn’t wait to get that bread out of the oven.” Using the object was a great trigger.

I actually wrote something on that. I have something that was given to me by my Godfather when I graduated from high school. My Uncle Bill was kind of a nut anyway, but he gave me a barrel with a figure of W.C. Fields leaning over the barrel, and in

order to open the barrel to dump your pipe tobacco, you push the tail of W.C.'s coat. When Uncle Bill gave me that for my graduation gift, I said, "Now, there's a reason for this, right?"

He said, "Oh, yes. When you were a little girl, you used to come down to the house, and I'd be sitting there smoking my pipe and you'd wait for me to do it. You'd be watching and watching, and just at the moment that I needed to dump my pipe tobacco, you would hit the back of W.C." Well, that made me really love that dumb old thing because it was a special memory he had. You could write that and it meant something. A lot of people actually brought their objects to class because they loved to write that assignment. Those are two examples.

I have also given them a phrase and had them write a story, and that phrase has to be somewhere in the story. The phrase I gave them was, "Logic tells me I'm a sane twenty-first-century person, but—." Some of them would have these dreams where they were being pilloried, and they'd write, "Logic tells me I'm a sane twenty-first century woman, but—," kind of thing. That's a good trigger to get them to write.

Another exercise was to report a story as if you were a journalist for the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. Most of them knew the five Ws: who, where, why, what, and when. I said, "You have to write a story. If you don't have one in your own family that you can talk about, then make it up, but it's got to be journalism. It can't be anything else. It's just the facts. You've got to tell what happened."

Then we went from that kind of an exercise to "Write a story about the memory you had of your father when you were eight years old, and I want you to tell me how you felt—not what he looked like, necessarily, although if that's important, put it in—but how you felt about your father when you were eight years

old." A remarkable number of stories came back that Daddy was an alcoholic, and, see, that just tears me to pieces, because that's the farthest thing from my mind. When I gave that assignment, I never even dreamed that would be an issue—God, story after story after story. That [prompt] works too, though.

One of the places where memoir differs from storytelling is that you're really focusing in on your reflective feelings. How did you feel about it when things happened? How did you feel when you were trying out for the cheerleading squad and you weren't chosen, not that you weren't chosen, but how did you *feel* about not being chosen? How did you feel when you discovered that you were going to be valedictorian of your class? Those are the kinds of exercises we go through a lot, and many of those are assignments, so they have time to think about it, and have time to write and rewrite it.

One of the worst things that people don't seem to be able to do is edit their own work. Every word is so precious and so perfect, no matter what. You find out a lot of things too. I don't think it was because I worked one summer at Random House, but I am a very good editor. For example, another dear friend of mine wrote something about a mantelpiece and she misspelled "mantel". She said, "I had no idea there were two spellings of mantel." Well, yes. There are, but she said, "Nobody else caught that."

One of the things we did early on—I don't do it so much anymore because people really get upset and it's not worth it—but for the first few years Esther Early and I did this together, we would have them write something and then pass it to the person sitting next to them and they could edit or make suggestions. A lot of people got very hurt feelings with that and would not come back to class. You would have to call them and find out why, and they

would finally break down and tell me on the phone. I just thought it wasn't worth it.

The other thing I failed to mention earlier is that we have a lot of exercises where we want them to write in their voice. We want to be able to hear their voice and then, in contrast, write the same story in third person and see what difference it makes.

Also, from time to time, we have professors from the university teach workshops, which I love because then I can participate too. We've had Christopher Coake from the English Department come and Ann Ronald has also come several times. Monica Grecu has done things for us as well. Stephen Tchudi came and helped us a lot before he moved out of the area.

One of the most fun things about doing this is that I am a very democratic woman. I like everybody to participate in certain decisions—finding a title for an anthology, finding a title for your story, if it's focused well enough, we can discuss it. It's amazing the kinds of insights other people have for something that you've been laboring over for weeks but they didn't know anything about. All of a sudden, right on, they're there.

One other exercise we do, which I think is really vital, is, after they've written a piece, we have them ask themselves just what is this piece about and did they hit it or not. Did you talk all around it or did you really hit what it was about? That's a very good exercise, because a lot of people say, "Well, I thought I started out talking about my inferiority complex, but instead I talked about how shy I am." Well, they're related, but different.

I'm sure there are lots of other exercises that I've forgotten, but there are many exercises and a lot of them we got from the Gotham Writers' Workshop. I ordered a book called *Project Memoir*, which I haven't picked up yet, written by a woman who's been

teaching memoir writing. I'm hoping that will give us some more good ideas for exercises.

What are the pros and cons of everyone in the class participating, rather than you lecturing?

There are always people who want me to lecture, but I won't do it. I can only tell you what I'm hearing about some of the other Lifescapes classes that are not OLLI.

Lois Smyres, who is Julie Machado's mother, runs the Lifescapes program at the Sparks Library, and she does pretty much what we do. She has a story to read from literature. In fact, Julie told me this morning that her mother went through every one of the short-story books this summer looking for appropriate stories to read.

What Lois does there is she will read the short story and then she will ask everybody in the class to comment on the short story, so if you have fifteen people in the class, that takes a lot of time for the class to go around.

I don't do that, but I did come up with something called *The Three-Step Response to Reading*, and there are certain things that people should be listening for when they're listening to a story. For example, are there Velcro words? Is there vocabulary that is used that is terribly appropriate? Are there words you never heard before? Say so; we want to hear if it strikes you. Is there anything that you really did not understand at all? Was the story written in such a way that it was obscure or obtuse, or it just didn't get through your brain? Or were you perhaps not listening as well as you could?

Secondly, what emotion do you feel when you're listening to the story? Let us know. Tell us. Tell us. Why did you feel that way? Do you know why you felt that way?

Thirdly, what connection did the story make with your life or did it not make any

connection whatsoever? And, please tell us what you really loved best about the story and why. It always has to have a why.

That's what we do. Not everybody participates every time, but it never ceases to amaze me that the least likely person—the person who is the quietest in the class—will often be the only person who will speak up sometimes, and I think, “Oh, yes, these still rivers run deep, baby.” Most of the time, there's quite a bit of interaction and talk.

Also, when we read individually, we expect the same kind of reaction. Those are the three steps you're supposed to look for, if they didn't use any words that blew your mind, if you understood everything they said, if you had no emotion at all, if it was boring. Fortunately, that doesn't happen a lot. On the other hand, though, you get something like that silly pantyhose story and everyone can't wait to speak.

There was another story we read that everybody just loved, but when it came time to write a reaction to the story themselves, they couldn't do it. It was called *No Left Turns*, by Michael Gartner, who used to be the head of CBS. He wrote this story really about his mom and dad. His father never learned to drive a car, so his mother did all the driving, and she didn't like to make left turns, so they would go around the block three times in order to avoid making a left turn.

It was a charming, wonderful story, and at the end, his father was dying. Evidently somebody said to Michael, “Well, what piece of advice did your father give you when he was dying? You were so close to him and he meant so much to you. What did he say to you?”

Michael Gartner said, “He said, ‘No left turns, buddy. No left turns.’”

It was a wonderful story and people were crying at the end, but they had nothing to say because they loved it so much. If you've ever

been in a book group—and I'm in several here—that happens. Every time we read a book that everybody loves, the conversation is over in fifteen minutes. You get a book that half the people hate and the other people love, then you've got a discussion going. It happens in class too.

I think it's really important for people to talk to each other that way and exchange ideas; it's really stimulating. Very often people will walk out of class and say, “Oh, that's the best class we've ever had,” and I'll think to myself, “What was different?” I don't know. Sometimes it just happens. It's fun.

I think we've covered most everything. One of the hardest things to do is to get people to focus and narrow their scope and write memoir. All of a sudden, memoir writing is *the* thing in current publishing, and if you write a memoir, it doesn't matter whether it's good, bad, indifferent, or even true, as we're finding out, thanks to Oprah and several other folks. It's all the rage now.

Everybody's writing memoir and I think that's really interesting. I can understand it, in a way, because it's very good for you to look back and think of the things you've done, even if they're nothing to anybody else. They're important to you and it gives you a real sense of accomplishment.

I'm reading a book now called *The Tipping Point*. It's nonfiction, but the point of the book is that the little things you do are as important as these enormous wonderful things. It used to be that memoirs were reserved for the rich and famous, and now everybody's writing them.

I've read some phenomenal memoirs just since I've been involved with Lifescapes, and it's because you get to know the people. In my view, it's no different than rehearsing for a play. If you are playing a character, you become that character, at least you try your

best to become that character, and the same is true in reading a memoir. You begin to understand being in somebody else's shoes. From that standpoint, I think it's been very instructive to a lot of people.

There are still people who have spent their lives wanting to know what the parameters are. If I were to write a sentence with seventeen words in it, is that better than a sentence with ten words? Some people get so hung up with punctuation they can't think about anything else, and who cares about punctuation today? Nobody.

The amazing thing is that where we used to have guidelines for punctuation, I don't think it matters all that much [anymore]. It really doesn't matter when you're reading the story out loud, because you don't say "comma." You just read. We have problems with that from time to time.

One of the hardest things for a lot of people is coming up with a title. They don't know what to call it. We did something this year we've never done before and we called it *Scattershots*. We just said to people, "You know, lots of you write little things. You write them in class in response to the short story we've read or you write them at home because it just hit you." For instance, one woman wrote this lovely thing about a hummingbird that kept coming to her backyard. It was very descriptive and lovely, but it didn't fit into anything else she was writing.

So I said, "We're just going to put together a volume of these writings and call it *Scattershots*. They're all coming from different directions. It doesn't matter what they are. Just keep them short."

I was amazed that we got so many contributions, so it's going to be a much bigger book than I thought. Half of the people didn't title their works, though. Well, I don't have time to go back to all these people and

say, "What do you want to name this thing?" So Joyce and I had a meeting yesterday and we just named them. [laughs] If they don't like it, that's too bad. But I say in the preface, "editorial license." We did it.

I think that's about everything I can think of to say about *Lifescapes*, except that I think it is very beneficial for people.

When I started in the memoir-writing classes, in the class I took up at Northwest, for example, Stephen Tchudi talked a lot about memory—where it comes from, how we can keep it alive and well—and the truth of the matter is, we don't know. There's too much we don't know about how some people have instant recall of all kinds of things and other people don't.

I have always been able to remember telephone numbers. I have no idea why, but I know all the telephone numbers I've ever had; they're up there. I keep thinking to myself, "They're crowding out other things. I wish I could get rid of them." Well, that's not the way the brain works. There's so many different components that the brain has to draw on every time we try to retrieve a memory. It's a magnificent work of art that it all happens.

It's incredible the stories that people come up with, and then they say to you, "Well, I'm not quite sure that's the way it happened." Well, one way to make yourself doubt yourself is to ask one of your siblings, because they have a completely different take of the exact same thing. That cannot discourage you, because this is *your* memory, not theirs, and that's all that matters.

I told you earlier there are times when I read people's things and say, "Yeah, right," and I know it's not true, but it doesn't matter. If it's important to them to write it that way, that's fine. As long as it's in their voice and they keep that voice and that focus all the way through, that's what's important.

What are the themes you've chosen for the anthologies?

This is where we differ from the libraries. When we really had great help from the university's English Department, it used to be we would pick a theme and all the short stories we read in class that year were geared to that theme. For instance, let's say it was dancing. So every short story that was read had something to do with dancing or a dancer. We're not getting that kind of support from the university anymore, so it's up to us to get the short stories.

Now, it used to be that when the librarians were very involved, they would have access to lots of materials. I was a librarian. I know how many short-story books there are, and for years I would go to the library and check out ten short-story books at a time. I would go through them and look for short stories that would be appropriate. It's a lot of work and we don't do that as much anymore.

For example, I was talking to Julie Machado this morning, and we have decided that our anthology next year will be something having to do with music in your life. We were saying, in the first class, we have to have a story that has something to do with music.

Alexander McCall Smith, who wrote the #1 Ladies Detective Agency series set in Botswana, has a short story about a band where the only criterion for joining the band is that you can't play. So, we thought that would be great. Then, as I'm walking out of the library after talking to Julie this morning, I'm thinking there's that wonderful short story called *I Get the Blues When It Rains*, by Ray Bradbury. It's fabulous, and I read that to the class about four years ago and Diane France was singing every one of those songs. Every time I mentioned a title, I could hear her humming it.

It really related, and you're really looking for the connections all the time. So, we have at least one short story about music, and I have cupboards full of short stories I copied from the library.

That's what we try to do. We really try to gear the stories to whatever we're doing. Last year, we didn't have a fall anthology, but for the last five years we've had an OLLI anthology that just the OLLI classes do. This one was *Life's Lessons Learned*, and so most of the stories we read had something to do with learning something from some experience. We try to have the stories connect, and if not the stories, then the homework assignments. We're working at it all the time.

I do a welcome letter every fall and every spring. I tell them the theme of the fall anthology and the theme of the spring anthology, and I give them a format sheet so they know not to format their pieces. If they send them to me and I'm putting them together, I don't want to have to un-format all their junk.

We have a number of people who have published articles in magazines and their own books. The trouble is, with some writers in the class, the minute they hear what the theme is, they write [their piece.] So, they turn it in to me the first or second class of the semester, and I often think they're missing the boat, because if they would stop and wait and listen to what other people are writing, I think they would submit much, much better work, but they don't always. Joyce and I are always the last ones to write anything because we're too busy doing the other stuff, so sometimes we get the benefit of [reading] what other people have done. That's about the way it goes.

I do like to have people participate in those decisions, so every year I ask them to give me a list of the subjects they'd like us to consider for next term. The list is very long, but there

are lots of things to take into consideration. There were several people who were really upset that we hadn't done anything about the pets in our lives. Well, a lot of people never had and never will have pets. They're either allergic to them, don't like them, or they don't live in a place where they can have them.

So, you do have to take lots of things into consideration. Somebody there says, "I don't understand why we've never written about our grandchildren." Well, think about it. Some people don't have children, much less grandchildren, so we can't, not exclusively. You can write about your grandchildren as they pertain to another subject, but it would never be required.

Which topics have been notably more or less successful?

I think the young ones, for instance, "When I Was Eight." This was the very first one the OLLI people did. I think some of the stories in there are just priceless, because we were remembering when we were eight or nine years old. I think those are probably the best, and I think that has something to do with long-term versus short-term memory. You can go back and pick up lots of things. I keep telling them it doesn't matter if their brothers and sisters don't agree, because, if that's the way you remember it, then that's the way it is.

On the other hand, we did something called "The Immigrant Experience." That was so difficult for most of us because most of us are at least a generation, if not two or three, away from real immigrant experience. Now, we have a woman in our class, Popi Anastassatos, who emigrated here from Greece. Well, it was a piece of cake for her, but for the rest of us, it was very difficult to come up with something.

Since Pera and I lived in the Peace Corps in the Philippines for two years, I could write about the reverse of that—not immigrating, but living in a foreign country. We had to keep expanding the immigrant experience so that everybody could participate. That was difficult. I think the more common subjects get the best reaction because we all can share in that experience. With lots of other subjects, we can't.

We did a travel book, which was a great success. They also did a cookbook once. This was before I really got involved, and the cookbook was also a great success. They all loved it. What we asked them to do was to find an old recipe and tie it in with their grandmother, their aunt, their mother, their father's family, something. Make some tie-in, in terms of memoir. That was rather successful too. I'd say we've done pretty well.

Life's Lessons Learned was a kind of spectacular thing in a way, because somebody like Bill Metscher would write, "Well, I did this and what did I learn? I learned not to do this. I did this. What did I learn? No, I don't want to do that either."

For that I wrote about being a librarian. I just thought the librarians in my hometown library were the stuffiest people in the world. You couldn't even imagine. I loved libraries but couldn't stand the librarians. It's just unbelievable how different my life turned out to be as a librarian. Sometimes [certain subjects] work better; it's really up to each individual. Some individuals can write on anything and they don't care, while others will write the same thing regardless of what the subject is.

The other thing is we have to be somewhat careful. We were talking this morning about somebody who wrote something totally inappropriate. I've had a few of those and I don't like it at all.

Can you give me a sense of how it was inappropriate?

Some images that were conjured up were just like dirty jokes, and we didn't see any reason to use that kind of terminology. See, we have to be so careful, because people pay their money to join OLLI. Nobody ever says when you pay your \$45, "Now, if I don't like the words you use in your pieces, we won't publish them." We didn't ever say that. I am just always surprised that people use silly images and silly terminology, trying to be cutesy. This hardly ever works. We certainly talk about that plenty in Lifescapes.

Obviously, everyone's experience is different, but what kind of changes or perhaps lack of change do you see in people, in their memory, in their writing?

First, I would say as the year goes on, a certain culture is created within the class. For instance, you'll ask them to write about the most disgusting thing they ever did as a child. People who've been in the class and who know each other a little better, will really write some pretty disgusting things. The people who are new will say something like, "Well, I put my chewing gum under the church pew." It's kind of bad to them, but to the rest of us, we're saying, "Oh, well, that's nothing. You ought to hear what she said." As the course goes on, though, everybody begins to spill their guts all over the place.

Annette is from Great Britain and she's got this very British accent. I think she's legally blind at this point. We just love her. She doesn't really write much anymore because she can't see, but she always has such clever right-to-the-point comments to make.

We asked the class once to write about something that nobody else ever knew about

them—nobody, not your girlfriends, not your parents, nobody—and she wrote that she stole lipstick from the five-and-ten store. We were all, "Oh, not you!" [laughs] So, that's one thing. A culture builds as the year goes on and you really begin to feel so comfortable that you can really write anything with these people. That's one thing that happens.

As far as their writing is concerned, it gets sharper and sharper. So, it's very exciting when someone hands in their submission for the anthologies and you realize that, not only has their writing in class been getting better and better, this piece shows what they learned. There may be a few who present something they had written before or something they just threw together, but more of the class show they're attempting to incorporate all the things we try to learn together. It is really spectacular to see the difference between their writing in the beginning and their writing at the end.

Another thing that happens is we keep hammering away that memoir is more about your reflections and how you reacted to something or how you felt at the time. That's what memoir really is, but there are some people who just can't do that. There are members of the class who just can't come up with an emotional response to things. That's all right too, even though their memoirs are factual stories rather than reflective reminiscences.

We don't force anybody to read. That's the other thing that happens. When the class first gets together, you ask, "Who wants to read?" Well, everybody sits there looking around like, "Oh, God, she's not going to call on me, is she?" We don't; we wait for them to volunteer.

If you can get people to start reading, you watch the courage of the people begin to get bigger and bigger, and pretty soon they'll start reading too. It's such a remarkable "aha"

moment when that happens. They all say, "Oh, I can't write like Mary does," or, "I can't do it the way Bob does." Well, just try it and you'd be surprised.

Most of the feedback that people get is positive, and that's the way it's supposed to be. We don't want to discourage anybody, and so that's why number three on the discussion list is to make sure you say, "Well, I really loved the way you talked about so and so," or, "I really thought that was great, describing the roar of the engine when you went down the street." Then they really do get it.

I think, for the most part, though, it works very well when you establish this. I don't expect it to happen the first or second class, but by the third class I expect participation from people and the recognition that you may not think you write as well as so-and-so, but everybody has a distinct style. Everybody has a distinct voice. They really have different approaches to things. When we all write on the very same thing, it's very obvious to people how distinct they are and yet how much we have in common on the same subject.

I think there's a huge difference between the beginning of the year and the end of the year, and for the most part, fortunately or unfortunately, I can't tell at this point. I'm of several minds myself. One of the classes has been together forever, and nobody wants to leave unless they die, and we have had several deaths, so the class is down to a more manageable number. I think maybe it would be good for all of us to have fresh blood in the class, though, to kind of turn it over again. I think that's one of the reasons why that particular class seems to spend a great deal of time talking to each other about their problems and so forth. They do it before class; they do it after class, but they also do it in class sometimes.

You want the culture. It's important to establish a feeling that people aren't going to

run out and say, "Did you know what she—?" I don't think anybody really feels they're being betrayed, but you don't want to see a clump of people talking about what so-and-so wrote from her heart. We have several people who have had just terrible lives, and you feel terrible but if they're writing about it, that's cathartic for them.

Why do you feel Lifescapes is important?

I think Lifescapes is important, number one, because it uses the brain cells that need to be used to keep the brain active, firm, and grounded in reality. One of the classes we're going to have next semester is a class on Alzheimer's. Vicki Hines, a biophysicist, who happens to be Eric Rasmussen's wife, is going to teach the class.

Believe it or not, a lot of people who come to OLLI and to ElderCollege come because they're afraid they might lose that edge of being able to remember and being able to read, write, and reflect. Lifescapes can really serve a very vital purpose in that regard. I really think that it does, from what I've seen.

Kay Cashman's daughter, Pat, is a geologist at UNR. Kay died last November at the age of ninety-six. She was coming to Lifescapes class until the last three months of her life, and she was as sharp as a tack. Now, I'm sure it wasn't because of Lifescapes, but it certainly didn't hurt that she was keeping active. She was also in my book group. We went over to Manor Care, where she was, and the last time we all saw her alive and well was when we had our discussion of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I think it's just vital for older people to do things like that for the brain and the mind.

The other thing is, as OLLI gets bigger and bigger, the socialization part of OLLI worries me. In a group like that, where you get to know one another and get to hear one

another's stories, there's a socialization that takes place without even trying because you're so anxious to write your stories. You're so anxious to share your stories that it's really an opportunity to like these people, and it is amazing to me to see the friendships that have developed through Lifescapes.

I think there's a third reason that I think Lifescapes is so important, too, and that is that they have an opportunity to say, "I'm a writer. I'm an author. I have a copyright on this. I am published in a book." Hopefully, most of us are writing for family members or grandchildren, children, or next-door neighbors, but who cares either way?

Annette is a good example again. I'll use her because I just adore the woman, but she has nobody left. Her husband had children from a previous marriage and she is in touch with them, but he's gone. She has a half-sister and a half-brother living in England. She has nobody here, and she said to me once, "Why am I doing this?"

I said, "Because you want to get it down on paper for me!" She has lived a fascinating life. She was in England during the war. She was living in a girls' school when they were attacked by A-bombs. Her stepfather just might have been a spy. Who wouldn't want to hear these stories, Annette? Come on. So, even though you don't think you have anybody to leave them for, you do.

There's actually a fourth reason also, and that is the combined wisdom of those minds—twenty in one class, twenty-five in another, plus the ones at Redfield, plus those at all the libraries— it's a remarkable circumstance that will live forever. We have the website and we have the print copies, and I think that's terrific that it's all there together.

I think it's vitally important and I hope that it continues forever, well after I'm gone. I really hope OLLI stays dedicated to it,

because we're not getting the money from the Humanities the way we used to, although Nevada Humanities is going to try. As far as OLLI is concerned, the book we do in the spring is paid for out of OLLI funds, and so I just hope and pray they keep giving and they will as long as I'm badgering them. I think it's a vital service that we offer older and more mature people in our community.

JERRY FENWICK

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Jerry Fenwick: I was born in Exeter, California on September 20, 1936. I started kindergarten with former Governor [Robert] List, and would have graduated with former Governor [Kenny] Guinn had World War II not come along during high school.

From there we moved to San Jose, California. We were there (until the end of the war) while my father made rockets, 16-inch shells, and portable power plants. Following the war, we moved for almost one year (this would be my fifth-grade year in school), to the Forestville area, and I attended Forestville Union School for the fifth grade. At that time, my father was selling paint and hardware for Santa Rosa Hardware. He was offered the entire state of Nevada, with the exception of Clark County...everything east of the Sierra as territory to open the first Sherwin-Williams paint store in the state of Nevada. We moved to Reno in 1946, just prior to my tenth birthday.

I attended Orvis Ring School for the sixth grade. You could not find a place to live in Reno at that time, but we managed to find a motel that had cooking facilities. It was located at Galletti and East Fourth Street, and was called the Star Motel. Half of it is still in existence. The other half has been replaced by a gas station. That was in the district for Orvis Ring School.

Subsequently, my father found a better, more comfortable place with more space. It was called Nick and Paul's Motel, which was at Stanford and B Street in Sparks. We never told the people at Orvis Ring School though, so I continued to go on.

From there we moved to what's now Gentry Way (it was then Airport Road) and we lived in a concrete block structure that had been recently constructed. It also housed a laundry facility for the owner's house. [We lived there] until May of 1947, at which time my parents bought a home on the corner of Alexander Hamilton and West Plumb Lane. I lived there until I was married in 1958.

I attended Orvis Ring School all of this time. When we bought the house, we finally told them in 1947, when we bought the house, “Guess what? We weren’t in your district.” I had made friends with the teacher and the principal, as had my mother, so there was no problem. I then attended Billingshurst Junior High School—the original one on Plumas Street where there’s now a soccer field. It is called Billingshurst Park, I think.

From there I went to the old Reno High School at Fifth and West Street during the last year of its use. Subsequently I was in the second class to graduate from Reno High School—the current one that’s located on Booth Street.

Do you remember during your childhood being exposed to different cultural things?

I was exposed to a different culture in one respect. Orvis Ring was the place where all of the Indian children went. Whether they thought I was General Custer with my red hair, I’m not sure but they all wanted to fight me. If it hadn’t been for the teacher, I probably wouldn’t be doing the interview. I never won a physical fight in my life.

My dad worked hard, and my mother was what was then was a respectable thing—a housewife. I guess now women aren’t supposed to do that, but that’s what she did. As far as a lot of fancy culture, no.... My sister and I went to the movies, usually the Saturday matinees. We helped my parents. After the first year with Sherwin-Williams, my father realized there were some things that weren’t good. So, he went into business for himself and opened Fenwick’s on the corner of Sierra and Commercial Row. My sister and I helped out in the store. I was smart enough that I could make change, so I sold stuff, made change, and packed the paint in to the car.

Our next-door neighbors were the American Fish Market, which were owned by a Japanese family, the Dates—D-a-t-e. I was exposed to different types of food—they were good cooks—and a different culture there. I was brought up basically in what would be white Anglo-Saxon Protestant circumstances, but I was exposed to other people.

The interesting thing, though, is there were virtually no blacks in Reno at that time. I cannot remember one in any of my high school classes. If there was, I don’t know who it was. There were a number of Japanese or Chinese... they were always very nice people, and some have remained friends through the years.

At that time, there was no opera association. There were things like the Twentieth Century Club, where they had dances for the more elite people, shall we say, and the same passed over to the children. There was also the entertainment in the casinos—the Riverside Hotel, the Golden Hotel, and the Mapes Hotel. At various times my folks would take my sister and me to dinner, and we were treated to the Sons of the Pioneers, Dennis Day, Nelson Eddy, and things like that at the various hotels. In fact, for graduation, my father took us to the Golden Hotel and we got to see Rosemary Clooney, her sister, and the Kirby Stone Quartet. [laughs]

Where was the Golden Hotel?

The Golden Hotel occupied the area that’s now occupied by Harrah’s Hotel, on the west side of Center Street. It was destroyed in a fire in 1962, and I do not remember how many were killed. They had, at that time, what was considered a risqué show. I think they kept their clothes on... anyway, I remember two or three of the girls that lived on the upper floors were killed.

That hotel had been built in 1906, I believe, and it had been modernized by putting nice metal louvers over all of the old traditional double-hung windows that you would see in an early building. They were all welded in place. They were doing welding in the basement, and the welding tank either exploded or caught the old wood material on fire. It went right up the old-fashioned stairway, and the poor people on the top floor didn't stand a chance. It got so hot, it melted the slot machines. I used to have a chunk of slot machine with nickels in it that had melted in that fire. It really scared everyone. They fought the fire from the seventh floor of Harrah's Club, playing a fire hose out onto the fire. They even bombed it with a Borate bomber like the ones they use for the forest fires. They flew over and dropped some Borate on top of it.

The happy thing about it, if there was anything, is that it was east of all of the main clubs on Virginia Street. The prevailing wind was from the west to the east and there was Center Street on the other side...they stopped it. But it took out everything from the corner of Second Street to Douglas Alley, though.

How big was the hotel and the casino?

I think about six stories.

Was in comparable in size to the Riverside or the Mapes?

It was comparable to the Riverside in size. It belonged to George Wingfield. It was originally built by Frank Golden, but Winfield subsequently bought it. He lost it in the Depression but remade his fortune, thanks to Noble Getchell and some other people, and repurchased it. He also owned the Riverside Hotel. He had the Riverside built.

The Riverside was a much nicer hotel. It was all concrete and brick, as opposed to wood with a brick outer structure. It was built in 1927.

You'd mentioned attending the casino shows. Was that something that you did often, or was it more of a special thing?

It was more of a special-occasion thing. Starting in high school when I could drive and I had a girlfriend...on my birthday that was the deal. I would take my girlfriend and we usually went to the Riverside because I happened to know the gentleman who did all of the background for the shows. His name was Mag. At that time, you could have shrimp cocktail with the jumbo prawns, a nice steak, dessert, and tip the waiter (and not be cheap about tipping him)...for the two of you it was twenty bucks. [laughs] So, things were a lot different. They've gone up.

The other thing...I don't know that this necessarily involves culture, but a child could walk virtually anywhere in Reno and nobody bothered them. You didn't have any fear. You could park your car virtually anywhere in Reno. My father did not hold a high opinion of Lake Street. That is where what he used to refer to as the riffraff hung out. It's also where the bus station was. Aside from that, we were pretty much free to run or walk wherever we wanted. We never thought anything about walking from school down to my parents' store, or, if I got bored at the store, walking home from the store clear out on West Plumb Lane. Nobody ever bothered you.

You'd mentioned in high school driving to the shows. In terms of the age that you could get your license, was it different than it is today?

I don't think it's changed in Nevada—it was sixteen, and at that time you got your

driver's license at a little counter in the State Building, which was located downtown where the Pioneer Auditorium is now. I opened the doors with them on my sixteenth birthday and got my driver's license, and I've held it ever since. It was much simpler then. The hardest part was parking parallel at the curb to go in to get your license. They usually took you around about three blocks and said, "Fine." They signed it, and you were on your way. It was a piece of paper. You signed your signature and they signed their signature, and it had the seal of the state of Nevada. As I remember it was white background with shades of blue for the seal and whatever else had to go on there. For the most part, kids didn't think of faking them or anything like that.

Of course, things were a little looser. They always managed. I was different than most of them in that the first drink I had, I was forty-eight years old. I think that is very different. The kids never seemed to want for beer or whatever it was, though. By the same token, there weren't gang fights. There'd be a fight after school. Two kids would get into it. Usually if they weren't careful, a teacher would catch them and grab them both by the scruff of the neck to break it up.

There was an incident at the State Building with a fight during the state basketball tournaments. At that time, the basketball tournament involved every high school in the state of Nevada. It wasn't broken down by divisions, and oftentimes the little schools would wipe the big ones out. That was kind of fun unless you went to one of the big ones. These two kids got into a fight on the dance floor at the State Building, and there was a police officer who was about six-foot-five or six-foot-six... a big broad-shouldered fellow. He walked up behind the two kids, grabbed each one by the scruff of the neck, lifted them

off of the floor, and marched them out of the door. He looked at one and said, "You go that way." He looked at the other and said, "You go that way. I don't want to see you again or I'll call your parents." That was a bad thing that could happen to you—you got in trouble and you called your parents. Then you were really in trouble.

As it goes along, my father belonged to a group called the Footprinters. This group was for businesspeople and police officers to benefit the Police Department. We knew a lot of the police officers. They came in the store to buy paint and wallpaper for their homes. Some of them had rentals and so on... I made acquaintances there. I also made acquaintances because my sister did all of the things that I didn't do. She would occasionally get picked up and maybe have had a beer or two, drag-racing down Virginia Street.... It would be like one o'clock in the morning and the phone would ring. "Mr. Fenwick, we've got your daughter down here. Would you like to come and get her?" I would go with my dad.

Years later when I went to work for the Reno Police Department as a supply officer, it was like old home week. I knew all those people. [laughs] In my case, under good circumstances, but not in my sister's.

When you were younger and the casino shows were still up and running, was that the only entertainment that was available?

That was the best entertainment in town. There were a lot of lounges, and they would have a piano player. There was a gentleman by the name of Ray Sawyer who played at a lot of the major lounges around town. His wife was an artist, and that's where we got acquainted. She bought supplies from us. He subsequently wrote a little book on Reno about his experiences with the clubs.

There were piano lounges in the Mapes. I don't remember one in the Golden or the Riverside. There was piano show entertainment and minor show entertainment at the Club Cal Neva. At that time it occupied only the building right on the corner of Center and Second Street. It was called the Copper Ledge, I believe. One of the people that played at the Mapes and at Cal Neva was an up-and-coming guy by the name of Liberace.

Did you ever see him play?

I saw Liberace in later years when I was married at the Nugget with my first wife. The show was worth every cent you spent. He really put on a show.

Radio was a big thing. Television didn't come to Reno until the early 1950s, so you listened to radio. There were lots of radio personalities. Occasionally it was a big deal...a radio personality would appear at somebody's market at somebody's dance. Our dances had live music. I cannot remember one where they had records.

Who were the bands that were playing at these dances?

The most popular one was a guy by the name of Lou Levit. He also played part of the time as a fill-in for the orchestra for the shows. All of the shows had resident orchestras and bandleaders. Bill Clifford was at the Riverside. They had live...they always had a dance act to open it, with both men and women in or out of costume, as the case may be. [laughs] You can draw your own conclusions, but they were productions.

The Nugget in later years was known for Bertha the elephant. When Liberace, for instance, was in town, he'd come out riding on her trunk in his ermine. She was an integral

part of the show and the people loved it. It was a treat. Dick Graves and John Ascuaga both were smart—she would appear at schools.

By the time they'd gotten Angel, I was like first grade and Bertha and Angel came all the way out to Stead, to my school.

Oh, yes. They were part of what was responsible for the survival of the ABC Television Network. In the days of black and white in the fifties, ABC Television was in real trouble. Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and some of the other entertainers in Hollywood got together and they created a show. I cannot remember the title of it, but quite often Bertha was trucked to Hollywood to appear Sunday night on this show. So she was seen nationally. It was wonderful publicity for the Nugget, for Sparks, and for Reno. She put on a pretty good show.

For the casino entertainment, would the house bands and entertainers be the primary show, or would they bring acts in?

Well, the band was the backup for the act. For instance, if it was Dennis Day, Jimmy Durante, or Ted Lewis at the Riverside Hotel, Bill Clifford's Orchestra would play the music and he would perform. Instead of the recorded music that you have now behind the acts, or one guy with a synthesizer, you had a full-blown orchestra. These people would then appear at schools—certain parts of the band would maybe go to a music class, to teach the kids about music and to encourage music. They were an integral part of the community. A lot of them didn't make enough money with the band music... we had several music stores in town, and these people were employed at the music stores. You could get lessons or they would steer you toward a good instrument.

In terms of musically what was happening in Reno they were really integral to the community.

Absolutely. Of course, there was music through the high schools. There was only Reno High School until Wooster High was built in I believe 1956. Reno High School had a very extensive musical program with individual instruction for the more talented kids, as well as a full band, a full pep band, and a marching band. I wouldn't say classical, but a classical-type orchestra played for the background. So the community made good use of what was available.

I want to talk about your dad's art supply business. Was the store involved with the local artist community at all?

We were, but it wasn't as formalized as it is now. There weren't any art galleries. One of the first galleries was the Church Fine Arts building up at the university. The art teachers from the high schools and from the university would give a list to the kids, and we'd try to get them to give us the list ahead of time so we could stock up on things. One professor came in and propositioned my dad one day for 20 percent of the take. He said, "I'll make sure all the kids come and see you." My dad threw him out.

Jim McCormick was a regular in the store, and, of course, is still living. Craig Shepard, who is now deceased.... I believe there is a gallery at the university that was named for both he and his wife. There was Richard Guy Walton, who came here with the WPA [Works Progress Administration] in the 1930s during the Depression. Robert Kaples was another artist in Reno. He is probably best remembered now in Reno for the two Indian murals that are in the lobby of the Courthouse

on either side of the main entrance (which you can't use now because you've got to go through the detectors).

There was a character who came at the same time by the name of Eddie Starr. Poor Eddie could never stay sober. He taught lessons, including lessons to a number of the schoolteachers. When he was sober, he was a likable guy. He was part of a family, as I was told, from New York that was well-to-do. They were in the leather business or something. He was kind of shipped out, and they'd send him a check periodically to stay there. [laughs]

At the time that your dad's business was open, were there other art supply places around?

When we opened, there was a store named Brundige's. Brundige's goes way back. I have photographs that show them in at least the twenties, and the business may have gone further back than that. They'd pretty much gone stagnant. I had to go down there a couple of times and pick up things, and the place was so dark it was like walking into a tomb.

My father's store started as a paint store because that's what he knew. Well, along with paint goes wallpaper, so we sold wallpaper. Paint at that time was oil-based and it smelled something awful. People wanted to open their windows [after using it], but that didn't work well in the wintertime. We had to do something else to keep ourselves solvent, and that's where we got into the art supply business. Art supplies led to picture framing, and then other hobbies. We sold ceramics. We sold ceramic kilns.

I talked my dad into going into the model business—plastic models and wooden models—so we sold those. It evolved into model railroading and the beautiful brass Japanese locomotives. We more or less had an exclusive claim on that in town. At one time we even did

locksmithing. Anything that was legal that we could make money at...that is how we existed.

For the art supplies, we bought stuff from all over the United States, not just the wholesalers on the West Coast. We carried things that nobody else carried, like things that sign painters needed. A long time ago, all of the signs were hand-painted. They didn't have these things run off on a computer that they slapped on a billboard. They got up there with a brush and paint and painted it. We carried the brushes they needed and the special paints. We carried everything they needed for gold-leafing. That was a big business at one time. Every doctor's office had their name on a door, and it was in gold-leaf backed by black. That was an art all in its own. I donated the last books of gold-leaf that my father had just this last year to the restoration project for the first Reno power hook-and-ladder truck that's being restored.

We had all these oddball things that most people had to mail-order. if you needed it and it was something you were going to be buying all the time, we kept it in stock so people could run in and get it right away. That made us different than Brundge's.

In the sixties, I think it was, Nevada Fine Arts came into being. That was also about the time we moved from downtown Reno to the Lakeside Plaza on West Plumb Lane. There were only the two of us, really, that had anything. Some of the other paint stores would carry a little bit...they might carry a few brushes and some sign enamel, but they didn't have the variety.

Was there a reason that you moved the store from Sierra and Commercial Row to the Plumb Lane location?

Yes. The city won't like this, but the city of Reno and the Reno Police Department

had Meter Mollies working for them who systematically chased all of the little stores out of downtown Reno. They wanted those properties vacant so they could be purchased and torn down. Then they could build these big wonderful hotels and gaming establishments that are now, for the most part, sitting empty as condos or hotels that failed. The Onslow... The Sahara, which is now the Montage, is still empty. Fitzgerald's is sitting empty. Harrah's Club didn't expand, but all of that's gone. They drove away all of the little businesses and people who were downtown.

People buy four gallons of paint to paint the outside of their house. Well, four gallons of paint is heavy to pack down the street to where they could park a car. There was a loading zone right in front of our store. People would pull in in their automobile...not a pickup truck, but in an automobile, because pickup trucks were usually relegated to people who worked or to agricultural people. Trucks weren't the common thing like you see today. People would pull in there to park, and the first thing there'd be was a Meter Molly or a police officer on a little three-wheeled motorcycles, and they would be writing you a ticket.

People would say "Well, I'm loading paint."

The police officer would say "You don't belong in there. That's only for commercial vehicles."

Pretty soon, you'd say, "Okay, I don't want to fight with it."

We had a fellow in Virginia City who used to buy a particular picture from an artist by the name of Cal Romand. It was a print that was made. He would have those mounted fifty at a time on heavy quarter-inch-thick cardboard, and he sold these in the store in Virginia City. They nailed him one day, and that cost us a lot of money—the guy never

came back. I don't know what he did after that, but he never came back.

They finally forced it to where everybody left. They tore all the buildings down and built the big buildings.

What is now at the location where the store was?

That would be the northeast corner of the...I think it is the Montage. We were directly across the street from the old Masonic temple building that is still standing and, hopefully, will be preserved. We were right on that corner. I think it was called the Montage. It is a beautiful place. They were too slow in getting it together, but I think it's sitting there in gorgeous shape. I don't know whether some of the people that bought condos are still living in it, but basically it is an empty building.

How did the nature of downtown and how people used it change over time?

Well, the local people left downtown because there were no grocery stores down there, there were no clothing stores down there... there was nothing there to draw the local people. Downtown was relying strictly on the hotels, the gaming, and the people who came to stay in the hotels and to gamble. That's what happened after about 1968. Then you had in 1976, if I'm correct, the MGM Grand and the Sahara...the Sahara was located on the property that our store was part of, which is now the Montage. It later became the Hilton, and there was one other casino.... They opened all at once, and gambling just went everywhere. That is what it was downtown. They had parking meters everywhere so you couldn't park and shop. At the time we were there they had meters,

but they were five-hour and ten-hour meters. They knew that when people came downtown to park, they were going to go shopping. It takes a while to take the kids to buy shoes, to buy clothes for school or to buy art supplies. That all changed. I haven't paid to park downtown in so long that I can't remember. When we left downtown in 1967, I was never downtown for anything until 1976, when I went to work for the Reno Police Department as the supply officer. At that time, I parked on Park Street where there wasn't any parking meters. It was right down the street from the Police Department. I used to have to go downtown, but by then I had a marked vehicle and parking was easy, shall we say. [laughs] Nobody bothered you.

Prior to these big casinos moving in, you described people shopping...

Well, let's take Sierra Street. We were on the corner of Sierra and Commercial Row. Next door to us was the American Fish Market. Next door to them was a little bar. Next door to that was Nevada Photo Service. Nevada Photo Service sold photographic equipment. They also developed pictures printed postcards. Next door to them was the shoe shop, and then there was an alley. Next door to that alley was a hotel that wasn't anyplace I would stay, but still it was a hotel. Next to that was the Dainty Cake Shop. This was owned by relatives of the Piazzos, who owned the Sportsman for many years. Next to that was Sears-Roebuck, and next to that was J.C. Penney's. Then came the corner of Second Street.

Then on the corner across the street was a drugstore, next to that was the National Dollar Store, and next to that was Montgomery Ward. Then you had Bulls & Butlers Leather Shop, where you could buy wonderful wallets

that didn't wear out in six months like they do now and beautiful hand-tooled belts. If they didn't have what you wanted, they'd make it.

Next to that was what we called the little dime store. It was the five-, ten-, and fifteen-cent store. It was a rival to Woolworth's but only in name. Next to that was Home Furniture, and then it was First Street.

Across First Street was the Federal, which was a first-class-type department store. Then there was Spina's Shoe Repair. Next to that was a law office building that was owned by the Sanford family, and then there was the river.

The whole town was that way. Both sides of Sierra Street, the west side of Virginia Street, Second Street down both sides between West and Lake Street...they all had little shops. Everybody lived off of everybody else. There were florists. There was anything you could think of. Then you had theaters thrown in amongst that. You could come downtown and spend the whole day in about nine blocks. There was everything that you might want. There was even a grocery store. There were bars. There were restaurants—good restaurants and cheap restaurants. We had all kinds of them. There was the Wigwam on the corner directly opposite from J.C. Penney on Second and Sierra. The Wigwam was known for its apple pie. You may have read their recipe. Periodically they print it in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. They had this white sauce that you put over hot apple pie, and it was to die for.

When you moved out of downtown down to Plumb Lane, how did it affect your business?

Well, since we were still in the art supply business, we didn't have that much competition. People still had to come to us, but you didn't have foot traffic. They drove in, they parked in the lot, and they walked into

the store. They got what they wanted, and they went home. There wasn't much wandering around. The center that we were in was on the northeast corner of Lakeside and West Plumb. There's a Save Mart store there now. Originally it was Albertson's. The main draw there was probably Albertson's.

There was a secondary Commercial Hardware store. There was a wedding shop called The Wedding Shop that was owned by the Bender family. They were quite prominent in town, and it was a draw. There was an early gym, exercise-type place. My dad and I used to laugh about it, because the women would go upstairs and they'd be there for an hour. Then you would see them walk to Albertson's and walk back, and they would have a doughnut or something like that. It was kind of a revolving-door-type thing. We got amused by small things.

There was a camera shop—Cameras Unlimited—which was one of the better camera shops in town. They were originally on Center Street, and the same thing happened with them— people couldn't get to them without being mistreated, so they moved.

I know that you've been an avid photographer. Can you tell me how you first got involved in photography and what about it interested you?

It started at about the age of four when I used to sit on a wooden bar stool in my father's basement in Exeter and watch him develop photographs. He was a good photographer. He did mostly in black and white. We still have some of his 35-millimeter slides that he took on the original Kodachrome. That fascinated me.

With the advent of World War II, we moved to San Jose. In those days it was not uncommon...one of the things that you did to amuse yourself was to go for a ride on

Sunday afternoon. Well, my father had bought a Leica camera from Ernst Leitz in 1939. It was a German-made camera, and he took the camera, my mother, my sister and I... we piled into the 1936 Ford that he had bought the same year I was born, and we went for a ride.

He was out taking pictures when two fellows in suits with fedora hats... everybody wore a hat then. The men always wore hats when they were dressed up. The two men walked up to him and identified themselves. They were from the FBI. Well, it turns out... we didn't know this because we'd only been in San Jose for a short while, but we were on the backside of Moffett Field. It is the main naval air station for the West Coast. [laughs] Happily, my dad was a Mason and these fellows were too, and at that time it meant something. They accepted his word that he was not a German spy with a German camera taking pictures.

My dad was so disgusted, he put the camera away, and he never took another picture with it until 1956. He and my mother went to Yellowstone Park. He didn't load the film right, so it didn't feed and he didn't get a picture. About the same time, I was traveling to international meetings with DeMolay, and I had wound up with a little Argus C-3 camera. It was more snapshot-type photography that I was doing, but I've got pictures of the 1955 downtown flood. In fact, one of them is in our book, *Reno Now and Then*.

It went that way until 1960. My first wife and I went to a slide showing. We'd gotten interested... I was taking pictures of sunrises and sunsets. I liked the pretty colors. My wife and I went to a showing at the Nevada Museum of Art, which was on Ralston Street. There's now some type of a church there with a lot of bells. It is just before you get to the freeway crossing on Ralston on the west side.

They're in the same building that was then the Nevada Museum of Art.

We saw this slide showing, and I met this gentleman there by the name of John Riggs. John and I got to be friends, and he was a member of the Reno Photo Club. He said, "You should come to one of our meetings and bring some of your pictures." I did, and I've been a member of the Reno Photo Club since 1960. There is one couple that have been there longer than I have that is still living. They joined in 1956 or something like that. The club came into being in the early to mid-1950s. So, I've been there almost since the beginning.

I got involved in competition within the club, and that led to membership in PSA— the Photographic Society of America. I started competing in international exhibits. During the 1960s and 1970s, at times I was one of the top thirty exhibitors in the world.

My greatest claim to fame was in 1965 I had a photograph in the Kodak Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York City. It was one of fifty they hung out of fifty thousand entries, so I felt really pretty good about it. They bought it for their own collection, and it yielded me \$450 before we got done. \$450 in 1965 was a good deal. That bought our first color television set. [laughs] It's a giant Admiral that had a twenty-one-inch tube. They were round then in the center, and it had a radio on one side and a record player on the other. It took up half the living room.

Through the years... I don't compete anymore. I do a lot of judging. I do a lot for my own amazement and amusement, and I sell stuff. At the same time, I collect old photographs of Nevada and of Reno and restore them. I've sold a lot of those. They're in legal offices. They're hanging in the courthouse in Ely. They did a remodel and bought twenty to twenty-five of my pictures. They had them framed and they're hanging,

I assume. I haven't been to Ely recently, but they're hanging on the walls out there. They're all pictures of the courthouse and of Ely.

I've done work for the Nevada Historical Society. I've restored some stuff for them. I've worked with the photographs with the Sparks Heritage Museum and done enlargements. I've got a program that will allow them to make much bigger pictures, rather than have them to go purchase stuff like that. I just do it for them.

Did you ever have any formal training or instruction in photography, or are you self-taught?

It's the school of hard knocks. I've gone to seminars put on by people. One that had a great deal of influence on me was the Photographic Society of America's convention that was in San Francisco in 1962. John Riggs and I went. There was a gentleman by the name of Ken Sloop, who did work sandwiching photographs together to get colors and to get pictures. I saw that program and it was love at first sight. Ever since then I've specialized... in what can I do with this? Can I maybe make something else out of it or make it look better? It was very successful. I didn't have the money to travel all over the world, and yet I was able to compete internationally and very successfully as an amateur. A lot of it was done because I got birds on a foggy day and a sun on a foggy day with a filter. Then I got a tree on another day, and put them all together. Lo and behold, it worked.

Can you tell me a little bit about cameras that you've used, types of film that you've used, and different exposures?

I started with an Argus C-3 and acquired a couple of extra lenses for it. I went from

that to an Exacta camera, which was built in East Germany. It was one of the first of the single-lens reflexes where you could actually see what you were taking a picture of. You weren't cutting off...when you look through a rangefinder camera, if you're not careful, you can either cut somebody's head or somebody's feet off. You don't do it intentionally. You think you saw them, but they aren't there because of what they call parallax. The lens and the rangefinder don't line up perfectly. With a single-lens reflex, you get what you see.

I've always been interested in flowers, animals, bugs, and butterflies. I could do close-up work, and I did a lot of it. I photographed the life sequence on a Monarch butterfly. I did the same thing with Tiger Swallowtail. I would find the caterpillars and raise them. Once it turned into butterfly, I would turn them loose and take a photograph.

I created these programs... I took programs into schools where my children were in school, and then other schools became interested. It made me feel maybe like it was a little bit useful. It was fun. It would justify some of the equipment.

As years have gone on, now it's a hobby. I do sell some pictures, but I am so far in the hole that I don't ever expect to get out. [laughs] I like to do it. I can go and sit for two hours to wait for a duck to dive. I try to get his picture and catch him before he gets his head in the water. I'm still working on that. I shot one the other day with a Merganser that surfaced and had a crawdad in his mouth. I was able to get that picture and get a picture of him where he'd swallowed it but there's still one antenna and one foot.... You look at this little bird and you can't believe that that whole crawdad went down the gullet all at once.

I enjoy that sort of thing and I like scenery. I do a lot of pictures of downtown Reno.

I get up on the hill behind me here, and I experiment with various things like drops of water. I try catching them as they splash into the water for my own amazement and amusement. Other people seem to enjoy them too, though.

In terms of being in the hole, is that in reference to how much photography equipment that you have?

Yes, I have spent far more than I ever expect to have come back, but it's fun. I have a computer that's quite fast, because I work in PhotoShop, which is not a cheap program. I have a printer that's capable of printing sixteen inches by a hundred feet if there was a program to do it. I have both flatbed scanners and slide scanners. I can do up to an eight-by-ten picture in one piece. With the programs they have now, you can take bigger pictures, scan it in pieces, put them all in, and hit a button. Pretty soon here is the picture back just like it was when it started. It is a considerable investment, but I don't have to answer to anybody. It keeps me out of mischief and off the streets.

How has the shift towards digital photography affected your hobby and photography in general?

To me, it's the greatest thing since bubble gum. I have asthma and I have allergies, and the chemicals that you had to use are not pleasant. For black and white, you've got to have, if you're going to do it right, a decent darkroom. My first wife and I tried doing it in the bathroom and doing it in another room where we blacked out the windows, but it just was never really satisfactory.

My main emphasis had been on color slides that are processed by the manufacturer.

I was a fan of Eastman Kodak's products. They're far and away the most permanent and the sharpest. They did the best work. That's what I used until digital came along.

Now with digital, there are so many things you can fix. One of the greatest things, talking about taking the pictures of the ducks, is you used to shoot a lot of pictures and you would throw a lot away. Now you can take a picture and you can look at it and see that the exposure is off. You can fix it right then. If you shot a roll of film and your exposure was off, you would wait a week to find out it's not right. The duck's gone. You've spent a lot of money on your equipment, and now you have this chip that will hold a hundred or two hundred pictures. which You can buy them for a pretty reasonable price, so if you get a bunch of duds, you're not out anything except your time. If you get one good picture out of the bunch, where you're trying to take action pictures.... A lot of the time you get a whole bunch that aren't good, but you get one good one, and you feel really good.

To me, it is wonderful the things you can do to combine things. You have a gray day but you have this nice vista, but the sky is just blotto. Well, when you get nice days with clouds, you photograph clouds and you store all these away. You then take a program and you cut all of this gray sky out, you slip the clouds in, move them around, make sure the shadows are right, and you have a beautiful landscape.

Is digital photography relatively cheaper than using film?

Once you get the equipment to do it, yes. That chip that you use to take your pictures... you download that clip to your computer, store it if it's stuff that you want stored on a disk, and reformat the chip. I've got one chip

I've been using for the last five or six years in the camera. When I go someplace and I know I'm going to need more, then I take more chips. Basically, though, this one chip just keeps rotating. Except for your time, there isn't any real investment.

How does the price of film cameras compare with digital cameras?

Quality camera... now we're talking about what things cost when a good Nikon camera was over \$1,000 in 35-millimeter. The cheapest Canon or Nikon cameras now will probably take a better and a sharper picture than a good Nikon one would. They've finally gotten enough pixels into it to where it will.... If you get into all of the features, you're looking at an \$8,000 camera today, but we're talking about thirty years and twenty at most on it.... It makes a big difference on it, but to me, it's the convenience. I still have fine pictures that I took.

The first thing I got was a Canon Rebel, and I think it was about \$500. The main thing that you need is a decent piece of glass or a decent lens on the front of it. That lens will fit the \$500 camera or it will fit the \$8,000 camera. You don't have as many megapixels—areas to record the image—so you have to be more careful with a cheaper camera to get what you want. If you try to blow up sections, you may have problems.

Except for that, it's so much easier for people. You push the chip in, you close the door, you make sure the battery's charged, and you are ready to go. Almost anyone can do this. I say "almost" because, believe me, there are people who can't do anything. [laughs]

With the film camera, it was a little more complicated. Like I told you, here was my father with a camera that he had had for years. He didn't load it right, he wasn't aware of it,

and the film never left the cartridge. It was never exposed. Well, with digital cameras you know right away. There is something that comes up says, "no chip" if you try to take a picture without one. If the battery is dead, nothing happens. You have to put a battery in it, and you're ready to go.

So I think it simplified things for people that want to take pictures of the family, the pets, or whatever they want. When you get into taking pictures of things like detailed pictures of animals, birds, and drops of water dripping—you can spend a lot of money to get what you want. An awful lot of money....

Are there instances today where a film camera would still be preferable to digital?

Only to the people that own the film camera. There are enough megapixels on a camera now that you can blowup pictures as big as you could with a film camera. To make a sixteen-by-twenty print is no problem at all, and you can go to forty-by-sixty print on the quality-end ones. The results are every bit as good as your film.

A lot of it depends on the program that you're using. It depends on the printer. I happen to use Epson printers because I think they are the best on the market and the most permanent. You can make a print now that will last at least one hundred years and probably two hundred years. Color photographs, for the most part, will not last that long that if they were made with film. Black and white will, but the color ones usually fade.

That is one of the things I do a lot of. People bring me something that looks a little bit orange. Depending on what you've got in the photograph, with a little playing around you can make a real respectable color print. You can get it back to the way it was when it was taken. That is a definite advantage to digital.

Where have you exhibited your work locally over the years?

I have shown at the art gallery on Mill Street—Artists Co-op. I’ve exhibited there. I’ve exhibited in the past at the County Library. That’s about it locally. I’ve been in slide exhibits all over the world.

What are some of the notable exhibits that you’ve done?

Salt Lake City—I’m an honorary member there. Buenos Aires—I’m an honorary member there. Don’t ask me why, but I am. I can’t read the certificate, but I am. South Africa, Como, Italy, which is a beautiful spot... I can’t remember the names of the ones in England.

How did these international exhibits come about?

Well, a club would get together and decide they wanted to sponsor an exhibit. You filled out a form, and you sent so much money with it and the postage... you used to mail slides. I don’t do this anymore. Now it’s all done digitally—you send it over the Internet. They tell you what size the image has to be as far as how many pixels by how many pixels. You send your slides that way and they are judged. They usually use a group of three judges. Any that I’ve been involved with had three judges.

There used to be an exhibit in Auburn called the Mother Lode Exhibit. I don’t think it exists anymore. There was an exhibit at the California State Fair. There was a good nature exhibit at Arizona called the Saguaro, where one of my pictures did very well. San Diego, San Francisco, Toronto, Chicago, St. Louis—almost any major city. I’ve got binders I can bore you to death with, with all of the ribbons.

I’ve finally lost interest in the competition end of it, so now I take them for fun. If somebody needs something in that way.... Most of it is just to prove to myself that I can do it. I’m not as agile or as fast as I once was. I wish I’d had some of the equipment I have now when I was thirty years younger. Of course, they didn’t make it when I was thirty years younger, or I’d have been in hog heaven.

Can you tell me about the picture that was in the Kodak Pavilion at the 1965 World’s Fair?

It was a picture of the finial of the Trinity Episcopal Church downtown on Island Avenue. It was taken on a gray day, and the finial is framed by a couple of cottonwood trees. I think that they have cut down those trees on Wingfield Island. I then sandwiched it with a picture of light refracted through a single drop of water, and it had swirls that blended with the steeple. That particular one has been all over the world in eighty-four different exhibits. That is why I can’t remember all the names—there are too many of them. I think the only place it didn’t do good was Hong Kong, but that’s their loss.

Then this exhibit came up for the Kodak Pavilion, and I just thought, “Well, what the heck. It is different.” It was their film, and I sent it and I was fortunate enough to do something with it.

I owe a lot of my photographic knowledge and encouragement to John Riggs in the days of film. He and I used to do programs together. They called us Focus and Out of Focus. Nobody ever explained who was who. He was always experimenting with things. He would experiment with something. I would experiment with something else. That was one of the things with the club at that time—you swapped ideas. Nothing was proprietary, or at least we didn’t think it was.

In later years with the nature.... A friend by the name of Tim Torell, who is a person who never met a stranger— he'd make friends with anyone... he was just fascinated. His mind runs about twenty-five hours a day, thinking, "What else can I do with a camera?" He was asking me some questions about things, and I was able to answer them for him, and we developed a friendship. He has the equipment for rough country, which I don't have, so he has hauled me here and there. The two of us have had a good time at various times.

Can you tell me a little more about what you've done with the Reno Photo Club?

There were other camera clubs and organizations in California, one in particular in Auburn that some of the Reno members were tied into. They knew the people and I think that probably encouraged them [to start the club]. All of those people are gone. In fact, there's only one couple that are left that were there when I joined, which gives you an idea of either the shape of things or the shape I'm in. [laughs]

The idea was for friendly competition and to learn new techniques. At that time, we were trying new films and things like that. At one time we even sponsored a major Photographic Society of America meeting here in Reno.

They had international exhibitions and there were a couple of us—I was one of them, John Riggs was another—who judged for internationals. We judged at the Placer Camera Club's exhibition in Auburn over the years, and I do a lot of local judging now. I don't compete anymore, but I do judging for either prints or what they now call projected image, which used to be slides. There's very little film used anymore, and it's going to all disappear here before long.

How often does the Photo Club meet?

We meet twice a month, and that's been standard all of the time. Right now we meet the first and third Wednesdays. We have added one extra meeting for the last Friday of the month. Originally it was devoted to the people who were taking digital.... Now that everybody takes digital pictures, it's become the third meeting of the month, and it is devoted to trying things out.

For instance, this next meeting will be on using little penlights and setting them to swing and make swirling patterns. You wind up with swirling patterns if you open the shutter and just leave it open. Then you play with filters, put it together, and you get weird things.

Can you do that with digital cameras?

Nikon's last two models have come out with the ability to double-expose. What I do with the camera is take two pictures and put them both into the camera. I drag them across, and by fooling with the style of layer... I can demonstrate it, but I don't know how else to explain it. Part of it will disappear and the other part will appear, and, lo and behold, you've got a picture with two things in it. There are programs that can cut out the background on one and slip it in behind the other. You would never know what has happened. We did the same thing with film. The picture "Hour of Faith" is, in effect, two pieces of film sandwiched together, then copied. The camera that I have now will do from 1/8000th of a second to thirty seconds of exposure. Just like on a film camera, there is also a bulb setting. I have an electronic release that I can put on it that will take one picture every second, every thirty seconds, every half a second—whatever you want—up to ninety-

nine exposures. That is the big advantage of digital. As long as you've got a big-enough card in there to take all the exposures, you just keep going. With film, after thirty-six exposures you were done. You had to reload.

You may have seen pictures with the star trails and they're in a full circle. Those are usually about ninety exposures, and you can double-expose them. In a picture taken at night in the dark, you get a lot of what they call noise. It used to be grain on film. You can take one exposure that is almost pure black, and the other one is a light trail. When these are processed, everything goes together and it helps cut the noise down. There are programs that will eliminate the noise. That is where you get into Photoshop and plug-ins. I like to play with these.

Have these different advances had a lot of effect on photography?

Photoshop has had effect on photography, on printing, and on illustration. There is another product called Illustrator, which dovetails with Photoshop if you're an artist. Where they used to take a photograph of a girl and airbrush it to slenderize the figure, you can go into Photoshop and push things out pull things in and virtually make a pasty face, which you don't want to do.... You can go in and make a person look perfectly natural. A lot of people don't even realize that you've done anything to them. It is just enough to soften wrinkles.

Before programs like Illustrator and Photoshop, how did people actually airbrush and edit photos?

They had what they called dodging and burning. Dodging is holding light back so you put less exposure on a part of the picture.

Burning is letting more light in to increase the exposure on your negative that you're projecting onto the enlarger. It took a lot of skill. You could also tint. In black and white, depending on the chemical you used (some of which really weren't very good for you), you could wind up with a gold tone or a sepia tone—almost a red. There were people that just for the heck of it would sit down with a black and white photograph and make a mask and develop certain parts of the picture. It would come out green for the grass and blue for the sky. You would wind up with a half-baked color picture. They would probably still be working on the first one if it really had to be really good. Just because you can do this, you do it.

On pictures for magazines they used an airbrush or, if a person was very steady, tiny brushes that only had maybe a half a dozen hairs in them. They came to a real sharp point if you had good bristle, and they could paint on these lovely tiny 35-millimeter negatives. They could paint things out and paint things in. I was never that steady. [laughs]

With Photoshop you can do things which you never could do before. When you underexposed a picture after the light meter didn't get the right reading or the light changed just as you took the picture, you were pretty much stuck with it. You could do what they called push process the film a little bit. That would bring something up. The bad thing that it really did was add grain, and that grain pretty soon.... If you are taking a portrait of someone, unless he was rough and rugged, you didn't want them to be a bunch of black and white spots.

With Photoshop, you can be quite a ways underexposed and overexposed as long as you don't what they call blow it out. If you get a spot that is absolutely pure white, you're married to it. If it's got any kind of tone or

color in it at all, though, you can darken it or you can lighten it. It's amazing what you can do.

That is part of the fun of it for me. I love to take the pictures of the animals and the birds. Even with a lot of those, though we would go very early in the morning because that is, for instance, when the waterfowl feed. You are shooting, and sometimes you are underexposing. You are getting as much light as you can get, but you're underexposing. With Photoshop you can bring all the colors out in that. That bird that many of us see out on Virginia Lake, for instance, has a black silhouette. When you expose it, though, there's all kinds of colors.

Is this the kind of thing you talk about at the Reno Photo Club?

We talk about how to do it and who's got the best book out on how to do it. There will be speakers who come in and do a demonstration. I've done a little bit because I think I manipulate more than most. I have no shame. If I can make the picture look better, I'm going to make it look better. It's definitely an argument for knowing what you're doing when you present pictures in front of a court They used to say pictures don't lie. Now anything can lie. In other words, if I've done something to a picture, I usually say I've done something to it.

Can you tell me about the photo restoration work you've done?

I've done it for myself to sell pictures, and my pictures that I have cleaned up are hanging all over the state of Nevada. I have done restoration work for the Nevada Historical Society, although they have a photo curator now who can pretty well take care of that stuff.

I have worked on pictures that have then been used by other authors, like Patty Cafferata. I've done quite a bit of work for the Sparks Heritage Museum.

Another thing that you can do with a little 35-millimeter frame in digital.... They have programs now where you can blow 35-millimeter frames to sixteen-by-twenty, thirty-by-forty, or forty-by-sixty and still have a beautiful picture. You could not do that with 35-millimeter film. The grain would all come apart. I've got what is supposed to be the best program on the market for doing that. The Sparks Heritage Museum will occasionally get a call for a larger picture from their collection. They bring it over to me, and I feed it into the computer and tell it to get bigger.

The former president has a model railroad, and he wanted a backdrop. That is another neat thing that is easier with digital than with film. We went up to Geiger Grade and I took a series of pictures (I think it was nine of them), from Slide Mountain all the way to Peavine. I put these together when we were done and enlarged it. I had to actually break it apart because it was too big a file for even Photoshop to handle. It wound up being twenty-two inches wide and thirty feet long. By splitting it in half and doing two fifteen-footers, it came out beautiful and very realistic. It wasn't all blown apart. So, now he has the Sierra Nevada as the backdrop for his model railroad.

How did you acquire these skills?

Well, it started with the Photo Club and with sandwiching these pictures together to get another picture and make something look better. The first computer I bought...I can't remember what its capacity was, but it was minute compared to what we have now. It didn't have a CD drive. They didn't have that

sort of thing for a computer. When they came out with a CD drive, I thought, "Oh, this is great." So, I bought one.

Well, with it came a program called Aldus. It was a program that allowed you to manipulate photographs—take away things that you didn't want and put things in that you did want. I was in the process of learning how to do this because it fit right in. I'd been doing it with film. I thought, my goodness, you can do this without worrying about whether the picture was clear white behind it or pure black so that you could sandwich everything.

About that time, Adobe bought Aldus, and they sent me a letter that read, "For \$99 we'll send you the entire Photoshop program because we now own Aldus."

For \$99, I couldn't go wrong, and I've been updating it ever since. It fit right in with my interest in history and old photographs. I collect real photo postcards and old pictures if somebody gives me something. I have first editions of all kinds of books on the state of Nevada, as well as virtually all the recent stuff. I have a better library than a lot of the schools in the smaller towns.

I was working at that time for Eagle Framing. It was called Eagle Valley Frames at that time. They were always looking for old pictures to sell because these people would come in...attorneys wanted them in their offices for nostalgia.... Somebody would say, "I used to live in this town. Do you have a picture of it?"

The owner would say to me, "You've got so many neat pictures, you ought to start doing the enlargements on those."

I said, "Well, if we're going to do that, I have got to clean them up a little bit." They had spots or cracks. So, I started learning how to get rid of spots, cracks, blood stains and all kinds of things. [laughs] I don't know why, but to me it's fun. It can take you hours, though.

I did one panorama that is about four feet long and about eight inches wide for the Historical Society. I spent a week, allowing for other things coming on...basically I spent a workweek correcting everything. It looked good when I got done. I did a 1957 picture of the railroad yard. Somebody stood on the superintendent's office there in Sparks and took a series of pictures. When they got them back, they took scissors and cut the pictures out and then Scotch-taped them together. It went like the ocean to get things to match up. This long picture had been on the wall of their office, fastened up with thumbtacks for years. The Scotch tape had turned yellow and dirt had gotten under it. You can't peel the tape off because you would take the emulsion off. I worked a solid week on it. I straightened the pictures out and got rid of the stripes of the tape. It is now hanging on the wall at Sparks Heritage Museum.

I have had a lot of fun with that. When we worked with the Centennial Commission, we wanted old pictures for the presentation. We did a presentation at the schools here in Sparks. It ran about an hour. There were four of us that went in and did the program. I had to clean up and sharpen a lot of photos so they could be put on to DVDs that I made with music and sound. I made five hundred of those for the Commission, and I think they sold them all. That helped pay for their celebration.

I sell DVDs on Nevada and some on towns along the railroad up at the Historical Society. They're a nice \$10 gift.

You also have another nice book, Reno Now and Then. How did that come to be?

Neal Cobb always wanted to do a book. Neal and I are good friends and we had worked on programs together. His idea was

that we needed something with our name on it. I thought it was going to be a headstone one of these days. I'm a much better storyteller than I am a writer. I can write, but it was just never fun for me. I love to read English. I can memorize and recite poetry, and ham it up to do it right. I had a wonderful time, and I love to tell jokes and stories.

Anyway, Neal said, "We've got to do a book. I want to do a book. I know how I want to do it." One thing led to another. I had pictures. He had pictures. I had a lot more photography information. We got a grant from the John Ben Snow Trust to teach Neal how to use a computer. I brought him from the nineteenth century into the twentieth, and it's taken years. He actually went out and bought himself a big fancy computer, and he's having a wonderful time with it. The purpose of that was so that he could catalogue his photographs. You would ask for something, and with Neal it was like Fibber McGee's closet.

There was a radio show that was quite popular during the thirties and forties in which Fibber McGee had a closet that he and his wife, Molly, put everything they didn't want into. There was always one spot on the show where he would go to get his coat, and he would open that closet instead of the other one, and there was this big crash. Molly would holler, "Don't do it!" It was funny. The expression "Fibber McGee's closet" referred to anything that was disorganized, and that was Neal.

Neal with his pictures... if you wanted something, he would have to go through it. Occasionally I still get calls from Neal asking, "Jerry, did I give you a copy of this? Because I can't find mine."

I know you have been involved with the Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS). Can you

tell me a little bit about how it got started and what its mission is?

They got started because Reno's past was vanishing. In the rush to build all of those multistory buildings that are now downtown sitting vacant, they destroyed things that dated back to the 1800s. In some cases, they destroyed homes that dated back almost to the founding of Reno. HRPS wanted to try to preserve this and educate people on the cultural heritage of Reno.

There is a national magazine and a national program on PBS called *This Old House*. They went all over the United States looking for areas where people are trying to preserve [historic structures and sites]. As it happened, the Powning's Addition was chosen to be featured as one of them. This area runs from Riverside Drive to Second Street and roughly from Arlington Avenue to Keystone. Sometimes it is referred to as Little Italy, because a lot of the Italians settled in that area. There are a number of houses there.

Possibly the oldest of all belongs to a member of HRPS by the name of Jack Hursh. It's located on Vine Street. That house was, as near as we can determine, built in 1860 in Virginia City and was then taken apart and hauled down here. It had all kinds of things added onto it, so it didn't quite look the same. Jack is in the process of restoring it as time and money allows, so it may be a while. So that is the type of thing we do at HRPS.

There is very little on the history of Reno taught in the grade schools. The history book that they use has one paragraph that mentions Reno. I think it was published in Southern Nevada and, of course, now Las Vegas is the biggest city. Up until the late fifties, Reno was the biggest city in the state. Whatever Las Vegas has, Reno had and started first whether it is entertainment or gaming.

We thought that it would be good to create a program for the kids in the fourth grade for when they study Nevada history. They set up a committee and I created a DVD with my old photographs. We go into the schools and we do, depending on the amount of time they have, thirty minutes to an hour on the history of Reno. Usually I stand up in front and expound. I have the ability to remember it, and I jokingly say I have the same mentality as the kids I'm dealing with, so we all get along good. They have a good time and I do too.

Do you remember how you got involved in HRPS?

I was urged to join. I had an interest in them. They put out a fine publication four times a year. It has good historical articles, and I save all of them. The articles give me information to put on the back of my old photographs or for my program on the history of Reno.

Felvia Belaustegui, who also belongs to the Westerners (another group that is interested in Western history and primarily Nevada), said, "We need someone on the board. Would you be willing to do this?" In a weak moment I said yes. I not only joined the organization, I was on the board of directors and will be until next year. I will then have served as much time...it's like term limits at the legislature. I'll go somewhere else, but continue to do the program with the schools because I do enjoy the kids.

How long have you been a board member for HRPS?

Four or five years.

Where are the HRPS meetings held?

We meet at Mt. Rose School for the general meeting. Our board meetings have been in people's homes. They were in the Lake Mansion for an extended period. Recently we needed more space for records and so on, so we have rented a space in a building on Vassar Street. We moved only in the last couple of months. We now have a place for our office as well as a meeting space all in one building. We have twenty-four-hour access to it. Before, the office was in the old Hawkins Mansion in a space that was not being used by the Nevada Interscholastic... the group that controls athletics for the whole state as far as Division A, B, and C. We could only go in there Monday through Friday from nine to five, though. Occasionally we would need to get to something, but had to put it off until another day or the next week. This works out much better.

We hold the board meetings there, but the general meetings are still at the Mt. Rose School. We meet the fourth Wednesday of the month from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. We have programs that relate primarily to the history of Reno, although it will spread out into the history of Nevada. The monthly meeting was last evening and the program was on the original Lincoln Highway in Nevada. We covered information from Wells (which was called Ipapah), to South Lake Tahoe. The gentlemen who did the program is excellent, his name is Bonar. He has slides of early pictures showing experiences such as people trying to drive across the sand. The worst section of Highway 50 was regarded, in spite of all the mud in Iowa and Nebraska, as Nevada, and particularly the stretch between Austin and Fallon. It went out across the salt flats in the desert. The people would almost disappear into the sand. They used cord roads where they dropped down logs, but eventually

those would sink and they would have to go back and do it again.

Do meetings typically have a presentation?

Yes. At the general meeting we tell members about what we are doing or where we are going, but primarily it is taken up by a program. Neal and I have done a program on *Reno Now and Then*. Jack Hirsch has done one on the barns. The gentleman who wrote the book on all of the families in the Governor's Mansion did a fine program with slides.

Who comprises the membership of HRPS?

These are people both young and old. We have university students involved and we have people who are older than I am, if you can believe that. They are businessmen, housewives, and people that are interested in history and in preserving what we have. For instance, they have let the Virginia Street Bridge deteriorate. Of course, it has been through floods since 1905. Now the city is trying to destroy it by neglect, because they want to replace it, but they can't figure out what to replace it with.

I'm stubborn. There are people who are engineers who know what they are doing. I don't necessarily, but any idiot can see that when there is a flood the water comes out above the Arlington Bridge and then spreads into downtown Reno. It doesn't come out at the Virginia Street Bridge and spread backwards. They haven't been able to figure that out, though, so the idea is to get rid of the Virginia Street Bridge because the city thinks that is what causes the flooding. They are going to start all over again next Monday. They don't have any money. I don't know where they are going to get the money, unless

they figure that the people in Washington are going to give them, the multimillions to build a bridge. I don't foresee it happening too soon. I may be gone before all this. It may be something for you to worry about, and not for me to worry about.

We raised a lot of Cain when they were going to tear down the Fleischmann Planetarium. As an organization we're in a large part responsible for the fact that when president John Lilley (another disaster for the University of Nevada) wanted to tear that down.... We raised so much Cain that he backed off on it, because it is historic (not because it is old, but because of its style). It was actually the first so-called Atmospherium-Planetarium. The style of it allowed people to watch the sky during the day as well as the planets at night. It was set up to project both, and it was the first one in the country. From my understanding, there are actually only two in the United States that do that sort of thing. It had unique construction, and is worth saving and preserving.

We're hoping that we can preserve the old Masonic Temple Building on the southeast corner of Commercial Row and Sierra Street. That is the oldest commercial building in Reno. It is also probably the oldest building actually built in Reno, rather than hauled in from Virginia City or someplace like that. It dates back to 1872. It survived the fire of 1873 (which destroyed most of what was then downtown Reno), and the bigger, more disastrous fire of 1879. Interestingly enough, both fires started right behind it. It was a brick building, and with the winds from the west to the east, the fire blew away from it. It is a unique building. My thoughts on it have been that it would make.... It's adjacent to that plaza that they want to create where they covered the railroad trench. It's an ideal spot

for a visitors center and a small museum. The museum would show things to see in Reno, with maybe a few historic objects. It would be staffed so that someone there could say, "Interested in touring the town? Do you want to go to shows?"

I don't know whether that is going to happen. The people that own it keep saying, "We want to preserve it." Now they are going to build a rock-climbing wall on the building next door to it. Even if they do something like that, though, and people are going to come in and actually climb on this wall and visit the town, they need someplace to get information. They need a neutral spot, rather than getting information from a particular hotel or motel who really has their own interest at heart. Whether that will happen or not, I don't know, but that is at least a thought for a use.

Can you tell me about the type of work HRPS did on recognizing the Powning's Addition as a historical district?

Once a year we have a strategy meeting. I was there this year. We get together and decide what we want to push. There are committees. The person behind the Powning's Addition was Felvia Belaustegui, primarily. We managed to get a grant to pay for research. Also, in conjunction with the University of Nevada's Anthropology Department and History Department. We had graduate students who did a lot of the research. Felvia wrote the presentation and put together the grant to get it designated as a historical area.

We have another member, Barrie Shuster, who is working on a similar project now for the area between Holcomb Avenue and Wells Avenue—the homes and the business. They have photographed everything in that area from Liberty Street to...I can't remember the south end of it. They have graduate students who have

been putting this together. They have binders full of pictures, listing who it belonged to. They are researching back to the beginning when the structures were built. It is a newer area than the Powning's Addition, but there are homes in there still standing that go back into the early 1900s.

One of the buildings was a creamery and a distribution point for Model Dairy. It is now a residence. It's located, I believe, on Sinclair Street, and it dates back...Model Dairy went into business in 1906, and this building predates them going into business.

There are interesting structures as well as more modern ones. There has been a lot of restoration work done on businesses down Wells Avenue, as well as the homes in the area. My first wife's grandfather owned a home that was built probably before 1910. Her father's home was one of three lots that her grandfather bought, and that was built in 1940. Her grandfather was Jack Threlkel. He owned the Reno Garage and he had a semi-pro baseball team. There was a street named after him where the baseball park was. Right now it is a parking lot for Wells Cargo's trailers.

There are a lot of prominent people [who lived in the area]. The streets are named after prominent mayors and attorneys, as well as other government officials. The 1964 Reno City Hall was just across Holcomb. Now that building is going to be a children's museum. It is supposed to open soon.

In the last few years, the neighborhood has benefited from the people that have moved in, and from the people that are buying homes in that area and restoring them. A number of them have opened businesses. They have preserved the building, but now it's a legal office... there are one or two used bookstores in that area that are doing quite well. It's been a good deal.

With my ex-wife's grandfather, there are a couple of other homes that they lived in

(before they lived in the last one), which are still standing down through that area. They are on the west side of Holcomb. There is one that is very distinctive. It has a rounded bay window. It is on Thoma on the west side. I think it is Thoma and Moran. It is right on the corner. It is a white clapboard. It is the only one that has this rounded bay window (instead of the bay windows I have here, which are as most of them were done). That was another house they lived in, and that house has to date back to 1900 or before.

What are the different committees of HRPS and what do they focus on?

They set up committees to do what they want to do. There are no set committees. The closest thing to a set committee is the group that publishes the *HRPS Bulletin*, which right now involves Debbie Hinman and Cindy Ainsworth (who are both board or former board members). A couple other people help put it together, and are members of HRPS. Otherwise it's individuals... Jack Hursh likes to sign people up to do programs. We have another member who takes care of the membership. We have a treasurer. We have a secretary, who at the present time is Barrie Shuster. She takes very extensive notes. When she gets done, if she lasts enough years, she'll be able to write a book. She's very thorough about noting who did what and what was said.

It's a formal organization, but as far as having all of these committees on various things.... We have a couple of attorneys in the organization. They are talking about redoing the bylaws. There is no big committee or anything like this, though. We give it to the attorney, and ask "Look it over. What do you think we should do to modernize this?" Everybody then sits around the table and says, "I like this. I don't like that. How about

this?" We take a vote on it, and that is it. The board is the main committee. Everybody does something. I act a fool in front of the schools, put together programs for them, and occasionally take pictures.

Then we have a... it has been a buffet-type dinner once a year. I guess you might call it the annual membership meeting. It usually happens in September or October. This last year it was at Caughlin Ranch, and kicked off the fall season. It is a moneymaker for us. We have had a dinner at the Sienna. We have also had dinners that were catered at Mt. Rose School, depending on what the subject was that year.

The other big thing that we do is walking tours, street tours, and the university tour. We do tours in the Northwest, the Powning's Addition, and a couple different tours on the homes on the bluff. One tour is called Mansions on the Bluff. We do a tour downtown. They're working on a tour on the speakeasies and the bars. We have a couple of members that enjoy those very well. These have been very successful and have been moneymakers for the organization. I don't have figures as to how many people we handled last year, because we only do the tours for a limited time. We do them during Artown, and we are going to do another set this year separate from Artown, because we have had so many requests.

We occasionally do special tours, but we get up into the thousands.... The Mansions on the Bluff, which involves the Newlands Home and places that people can't normally get that close to, even though it's on the street... occasionally one of the homeowners will say, "Well, come on in." Then it is a big deal. For the Mansions on the Bluff, we've had as many as ninety people show up, and that is a mob. They try to break it down to have no more than about thirty so that the people can hear. Also if you string ninety people out down the street, it's like... if you have

had anything to do with kids in school, they just got bigger. They wander off, they stop to look at things and then they get lost.

Are there other ways that HRPS reaches out to the community?

Well, we serve as...I hate to use the word "experts," because we aren't experts, but there is a great deal of interest. Many members have been to conferences on historic preservation. We are usually invited to... with the Virginia Street Bridge, we are one of the sources the city has gone to.

People will serve as various members, and then they will report back to HRPS as to what is going on. When they were considering buying the post office downtown, Neal Cobb (who is a member of the organization but not a member of the board), and Cindy Ainsworth who is now head of the Reno Historic Preservation Commission, which is the agency that overlooks trying to preserve some of these things.... They finally decided it might not be a bad idea. Cindy, Neal, and a couple of other members that served on that commission, and they would report back to HRPS and the board would say, "We think this is a good idea. We don't think this is." They would tend to carry that back and say, "Well, if people that are opposed to it..."

We used to host a luncheon for the people that the commission gave awards to. The city gave out so many plaques. I'm not sure with the financial situation who is going to do what now. One of the big engineering organizations is who had paid for the plaques, and we used to host a luncheon for them.

What does being a board member entail?

You have to go to the meetings and read the minutes. We meet once a month. The main

thing that I have provided is my expertise in history. It doesn't take that much time on the board. Doing the programs and the bus tours that go along with the programs takes as much time as any of the other work. There are some people that like to go to conferences. If they have a conference on historic preservation in Williamsburg and they like to travel across the country, they will go back to that.

I think it started as, and it still is, more of—don't get me wrong—a ladies' organization. They have done a lot of good like the Atmospherium-Planetarium.

They spent \$750,000 on these "experts" for the last design on the Virginia Street Bridge. They wanted to put a drawbridge in that would have begun at Court Street and would have ended at First Street. What does that do to the Riverside and ramping this up? It was going to need a fourteen-foot clearance. Well, the water would run under there, there is no question about that. Of course, all that other water that's coming down the street still would have got.... They even submitted a picture, as an example of the bridge, one of the waterways on Florida with an oceangoing cargo ship. I can see some guy on a kayak or a canoe going under the bridge. The city rejected that proposal, and they wasted \$750,000, as far as I'm concerned.

What are some of the biggest accomplishments and changes associated with HRPS over the time that you've been involved?

The designation of the Powning's Addition. When you get these historical designations there are rules that you have to follow. If a person buys a piece of property in there and wants to do anything, they have certain standards that they have to meet. You have to preserve the integrity of the structure. You can modernize—you can put in toilets and

appliances — but the main appearance of the house... if there are structural features, like an arch between a living room and a dining room, they have to be preserved. You can still make it livable, though. You don't have to sit around a woodstove like the original people did. As this Wells Avenue project comes to pass, these things take a long time to do. They take a great deal of expense as they go along. The city has to set up legal stuff to make sure that everything is researched. You don't want to wind up in court with somebody saying, "You know, the way you went about this is wrong," and have to throw it all out the window with everything going to pieces. Right now it is a problem because the city doesn't have any money. Basically, nobody has any money.

HRPS was also very instrumental in raising a ruckus over Lilley's idea to create a greenbelt between the university and the freeway and wiping out...there are a number of homes down Center Street that predate the University of Nevada. He wanted to tear all that down too. He was a real winner, but then it is the Nevada way. We tend to pick winners every once in a while. Since I don't work there and I'm not a student, I can say what I think. They don't owe me anything and I don't owe them anything.

We raised a lot of ruckus over the Oral History Program too. Neal and I were prime movers in that because of the way you and Tom and Mary treated us ... we didn't want to see that go, and we still don't. We're still trying to sell books and raise support. They are penny wise and pound foolish, and they've forgotten what a university's for. It isn't basketball and football.

Have there been any notable changes in HRPS?

No, I don't think so. I don't think their aims have changed. The biggest thing previous

to the program in the schools...everything was geared either to government or to adult individuals. Suddenly we decided that eventually we are going to have adults and these adults should have some understanding of how the city got here. That starts with me when I was with the city of Reno and finally persuading that the city we needed to educate the employees, particularly those who never got past high school on why is Reno here and how it got to be here.

I guess that is my pet peeve — the lack of respect for what came before. You are going to make the same mistake. I hate to say it, but whether it is nationally or statewide, we're headed down the road again. We'll know later, though.

Can you tell me about the Nevada Opera performances that you've attended?

It was a chance to dress up. At one time, going back to the Holiday Hotel, the Holiday used to have a dinner before the Opera. It was multi-course dinner, and they always had wine. You would go to the dinner...everybody was dressed up. They were not in cowboy boots and blue jeans. They would usually have someone from the Opera or perhaps a professor from the university to tell you a little bit about the history of the show and a little about opera.

It was always a nice dinner. You would then go across the street and see the opera. They would usually have some kind of reception in between the acts. On the opposite side of Pioneer, there is a part that was never really finished. I haven't been in the building for some years now, so that may be [Pioneer Underground is now].

There was never anything like this until the Pioneer Auditorium was built. The State Building was used for all kinds of functions, but I don't think they ever had an opera

there. They would have the ski movies. They advertised Warren Miller which had all of the powder snow flying. He has one every year, anyway. He specialized in that type of thing. They used to have that sort of thing at the State Building.

The Reno Photo Club sponsored a couple of different programs by Eastman Kodak, which were quite elaborate. Of course, they are trying to sell Kodak film. They told you who they were. They didn't get out there and say, "Now, remember, we've got the little yellow boxes." These were fine photographs, and it was in the early days. Now with DVDs, you'll have one picture fade into another. At that time they used three projectors, and these things were timed. One would come on and the next one would fade. It was beautiful to watch. When you went home and tried to do it yourself, it was a project and a half. There were a few people that were clever enough to do it.

They had high school dances at the State Building. They had all kinds of dances, because the hotels—the Riverside, the Mapes, the Golden—didn't have big banquet rooms. If they were going to do something like that, it was done in the... they did use the Fable Room occasionally in the Mapes. They used the Masonic Temple. When they built the addition on in the fifties, they had a large banquet room area there. They would use the State Building. Anything that needed a big open expanse where you could get a lot of people in, that is what it was used for.

When they built the Pioneer Auditorium, it was primarily for musical functions where you had a crowd come in and down to watch. There was no ability to dance or anything. You had a stage.

That is when they created the Nevada Opera Association. I wasn't a member at that time, but at one time it was really a going group. We were fortunate that for a number of

years we had the Captain & Tennille. They had a home in Washoe Valley. They did musicals in the summertime. Opera season was usually October to May, and they would have about four performances a year. In order to make money for them, Toni Tennille volunteered her part. The opera had to spend money on other things, but they didn't have to pay her. They did a number of musicals. Since then, they have two separate groups. One group is musicals that they bring in from Broadway, and the other one is still the Nevada Opera. The Reno Philharmonic plays at Pioneer as well.

The only place we had for plays at that time...on Sierra Street there was the Reno Little Theater. That was where you went for a serious play, and it was a very small group. Most of the plays were done with Reno actors, but occasionally they would bring in somebody who was better known for one part. They were fun, intimate things to go to. I don't remember what the capacity of that building was, but there would be maybe two hundred on a good day.

Can you tell me about the opera that featured Nazis?

I can't remember which one it was, whether it was *Tosca* or *Carmen*. They had various directors, because somebody would move along and leave town. They went through a year with all kinds of goofy things. They decided they were going to modernize this particular opera, which was actually set in the nineteenth century. That was the thing that I always loved about the opera—the elaborate costumes, like *Aida* and their idea of what Egyptian costumes were. In this opera, they didn't have swastikas, but they had the belt and the black uniform. They had the mustache a little like Hitler, and they

clicked their heels and marched around. I can't remember whether they had a lightning bolt where the swastika should have been. Basically they had modernized it into the twentieth century, and that was my last year. [laughs] I didn't renew my membership. I haven't been back. I don't know what they are doing now.

I've seen the same thing on PBS. Every once in a while they will get some guy who has a new way of doing things. My idea is that the guy that wrote this thing had something in mind, and it was very popular and people liked it. Maybe I'm living in the past, but that's what I enjoy. When they start horsing around with it, I lose interest.

Do you remember Pioneer being built?

Yes. They dug a hole in the ground and they built it. One of the sad things about that building is it's almost all below ground in a flood plain. It has had some terrible things happen to it. They have lost the entire stage and all of the seats at least two times and maybe more than that. It's almost impossible to sandbag it and protect it when it has flooded. It flooded actually above street level or to street level. The 1955 flood was before they built Pioneer. It was still the State Building, and the Historical Society had to clear everything out of the basement. It was before they had moved up to the university campus, and it was a mad scramble. The water did not get up to get in. If you have ever seen pictures of the State Building, there are a number of steps to get up to the first floor-auditorium level where the dances were held. They managed to get everything up there before, and they would get everything out of the basement of the library so that things didn't get ruined.

When we had the 1997 flood, they had extensive damage in the Pioneer. We had a flood in 1964. I think the building was there

then. They managed to keep some water out, but they had to replace half of the seats on the first floor. The balcony didn't have any problems.

Do you have a sense of how Pioneer changed the cultural life of Reno?

The main thing is the interest in the Broadway shows in an effort to keep something going there. Pioneer is used extensively for musical programs for the schools now. They will have buses parked solid around there at various times of the year.

The Reno Philharmonic has come in. Originally there were a very small group, but they have now evolved into a fine musical organization. They put on as many or more performances now than the Opera did. Originally, the Opera was really the big fancy use for the auditorium. They have had lectures. They can do slide presentations (projected images presentations is the correct term now). They are set up to do that. The building has an interesting design. If you are way over on the sides, you don't have a good view of the stage, and there are dead spots where the acoustics are...I don't know what it was intended to be built for when they built it, but it wasn't a good idea. It was laughingly referred to as the Golden Quonset Hut or the Golden Turtle. It depended on who was talking about it.

I think the Quonset hut came about because it's rounded and most of that roof is metal of one sort or another. Quonset huts were built out of metal. That was a disparaging term. Quonset huts were about as bad as you can get. I don't know whether people ever knew this or whether it ever mattered, but the Sparks Theater was a giant Quonset hut with a front façade. It looked like a regular building, but the rest of the building was just half round. When they tore it down, it was

called the King of Clubs. It became a couple of different gaming clubs in that same building. So it held up. There was that to be said for it.

Are there other places in Reno that have been a focus of arts and culture or have been a venue for arts and culture?

The Smith Family in Harolds Club...when they built their seven-story addition, they had a little lounge upstairs. I don't have any idea how many people it held at that time. I was in high school and going to the university, and I didn't have any real interest. The Smiths were interested in opera and music, and they brought in several prominent musicians, singers, and players for a special night. I think they lost money on every one of them. It was something that Harold and Pappy wanted to do up on the seventh floor. They went all out with the tuxedos and the whole ball of wax.

There were organizations like the group that used to give money to the hospitals. They used to have a black-and-white tie ball. I can remember going to a couple of those. One was at the Airport Plaza. Another one was at then was the MGM. They had space to do that sort of thing. I don't remember the Riverside, the Golden.... The Mapes brought in Nelson Eddy. Nelson Eddy was a singer par excellence. He is noted for his song "Rose Marie" and "Give Me Some Men." He made a movie at Emerald Bay, and they built an Indian village at Emerald Bay. You can actually buy postcards of this, and this Indian village is the funniest thing you ever saw. I don't think Indians ever lived that way. They talk about him doing...there was a song called "The Indian Love Call." They said the echo lasted for five minutes going up and down. He had a marvelous voice.

He sang with a female singer by the name of Jeannette MacDonald, and they made records back when they were about this thick

and made out of shellac. The Mapes brought him in toward the end of his career, but that would be probably as close to having... They also had Mario Lanza. He was an untrained tenor, but could sing just beautiful. For some reason he gained weight, got upset, and committed suicide, which is sad. He made movies—*The Student Prince* was one. You will see it occasionally on television in beautiful Technicolor. The Nelson Eddy movies were all black and white. He did a couple movies with the Mounties, with the flat hat like the Highway Patrol wears now. That is where they got that Mounty hat name. He cut a fine figure and had a great voice.

The university, particularly after they built Church Fine Arts, would have someone come in and give a recital or a lecture. In fact, a picture came about in part because of a lecture by a guy whose last name was Weigers. He was German and he was playing with light refracted through drops of water. John and I went a lot further than he had. He was photographing with a regular lens, so you would have these small pretty-colored designs and so on. We thought, well, what happens when you magnify these things?

In the time that you've lived in Reno, how would you say the cultural landscape has changed?

Well, there is more of what they consider culture. When I came here in the forties, there was no Nevada Opera. There was no Philharmonic. The high schools put on a musical every year—Usually it was the seniors. Some of them were pretty good, but it was amateur talent. The entertainment was major actors or musical acts—the same thing that you would see on television or would hear on the radio. We had Tony's El Patio Ballroom, which was on Arlington and Commercial Row. He had actors. His name was Tony

Pleshette, and they used to say, “Swing and sweat with Tony Pleshette.” [laughs] They would have dances. This was during the war in the thirties and the forties.

There would be bands that would go through. A popular band was Horace Hite. He played at the university. Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians was another band. They appeared at the Nugget several different times, playing all kinds of music. It was primarily singing— beautiful music.

We had the Shrine Circus. That was a big thing. They used to run a train from Elko all the way into Reno. They picked up all the kids who wanted to go along the way. They were all guests of the Shriners that one day at the Shrine Circus. The Shrine Circus was held outdoors in Mackey Stadium. You sat in the bleachers under the eaves, and they did the acts out on the field.

So things, of course, have grown. Harolds Club sponsored fireworks through the summer every weekend at Mackey Stadium. They would have a number of fireworks. One of the big features is they had two battleships outlined in fireworks and they were shooting Roman candles at each other. They set fire to the fields. Mackey Field at that time was roughly where Mack Social Science is now. On the east end of it, there was somebody’s field, and that went on over to Evans Avenue. One of the fireworks set fire to it, and they had the fire engines come out. They were out putting out the fire while the rest of the display is going on.

They always had a big American flag. It was free. You could drive in. If you didn’t want to see everything that was down on the field, you could sit in your car in the dirt parking lot, which is now all of the area between Mack Social Science, the old gymnasium, Lincoln Hall, and the back of the really old gymnasium, which is where the Getchell library is now.

So that was entertainment for one night. It didn’t cost you anything. You would go down there and sit and watch the fireworks. They always had a big crowd and it was great entertainment. They had the Harolds Club bus— the covered wagon—and the guy riding the horse, that Harolds used on their license plate editions.

There wasn’t anything that I would call fancy or what they would call culture. There were groups. The Twentieth Century Club had a fancy dance. You had a couple of fancy dances at the high school, just as you have today (although you didn’t rent limousines). It was a big deal to buy a nice orchid corsage that you would give to the girl, and you went in your own car or a friend’s car. There would be two couples. They were held either at the high school, at the California Building, or occasionally in the State Building. If you wanted to do something really fancy, [dances would be held at] the Fable Room of the Mapes Hotel. There weren’t the organized groups that there are now, though.

The Nevada Artists Association was in a little old house on Ralston Street. Now it’s a church— maybe like Baha’i faith. [It is the building] up there with all the bells in front. That was the Nevada Artists Association, and they had probably about as much space as I’ve got in this house. They had pictures hanging on the walls. They would have exhibits. That’s where I became involved with the Reno Photo Club. They had a way to open two rooms up and make them dark, and the Reno Photo Club sponsored an international exhibition of slides from the Placer Camera Club in Auburn that John Riggs judged. My first wife and I thought that would be a neat event to go to, and then we got to talking to John Riggs and his wife and we became friends. Because of him, I joined the Photo Club. That was 1960. So that was culture, but it was pretty amateurish and pretty smally organized.

MARY LEE FULKERSON

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Mary Lee Fulkerson: I was born here in Reno at St. Mary's Hospital. I often wondered if that is why I got my name, because of St. Mary's.

However, my parents lived in Quincy. My father was a lumberman. They drove clear to Reno, my mom had me here, and we went back to Quincy. I spent some childhood years in California, and moved back to Reno when I was in junior high school. We've been here off and on ever since.

My husband was a career military officer, so we would leave and then come back. Finally, we came back in the early 1970s.

Can you tell me a little more about your parents?

They had a long, devoted marriage. It is surprising to me because they both came from broken homes. They were both poor. Their mothers were tough women who managed to

raise them on their own, especially my father's mother. I think she is a great woman. They started with nothing and they ended up... my father got into the lumber business and had several sawmills around. In fact, he had one where Patagonia is now. That was the Nevada one. They want a picture of that mill so they can put it on their wall.

As I say, we moved back to Reno. That was in the 1950s when I moved back and I started junior high school at Billingshurst. Dad started a sawmill here, and Mom was a stay-at-home mom. I was the oldest of six children, so she had six reasons to stay home. Besides, women didn't really work then anyway.

So that is my history and I'm proud of it. I have a sister and two brothers who live nearby, and we get together almost every holiday with all our children. It is a pretty good deal.

Can you tell me what the schools you attended were like?

We lived in the country at the time. We lived in a little town called Thermalito, and we

lived way out in the country. I was a bumpkin. I went to a school that had all eight grades in one building. I was so intimidated by Reno. My brother and I both were. We were the oldest.

I'll never forget, we had to rent a house and walk to school, and we had never seen city blocks. All the houses looked alike to us. The population was about 50,000 then when we moved here. We would get lost walking to school and walking home from school.

We were not accustomed to kids' hierarchies or anything like that, and so I had a tough time at Billingshurst. I was really a country child. Although my parents were middle class or upper middle class, it didn't make any difference. I was totally intimidated by the class structure at Billingshurst. That was the old Billingshurst that was on Plumas Street. Of course, you get through those things and you make friends.

Then I went to Reno High. I enjoyed Reno High School. I was in the Three Arts club. That is when I first got inklings that I might be an artist, outside of the mud pies I used to make. At that time I didn't even know there was such a thing as sculpture. My parents didn't collect art, except my mother had a picture of Jesus on the wall and maybe some landscapes. I didn't really know much about art, and that is what Reno High School did. I started taking art classes at Reno High with Mrs. Muriel Corbett, and she was quite inspirational. I worked with clay. That is when I knew I loved three-dimensions.

Reno High was a pretty small school. We were the first class to go clear through the new Reno High building. I still call it the "new" Reno High School. We just recently had our fifty-year reunion. That is how high school was.

I was editor of the newspaper. Girls' athletics was really strong. It stopped after

that. We had Helene Aldaz, who led all the girls' athletics. There is something about the power of athletics. It gives you personal power. I thought in view of how women were treated in those days, it was a very good experience. I'm glad we moved to Reno.

I used to walk down to the YWCA. You would walk along the river and the YWCA was on First Street, right next to the 20th Century Club. I would make art things. I used to go there every day to walk along those trees and make art. It is too bad there is no YWCA anymore.

Reno was wide open. I mean, it wasn't as if we had never been to the city. Dad had conventions in San Francisco. We all went and stayed at the St. Francis Hotel. It wasn't like it was something new, but we never went to an art gallery. Compared to the country, it was awesome. It was very scary. It was totally intimidating as far as my peers. I was such a tomboy in the country. I was the best baseball player. To come here, at B.D. Billingshurst—we called it B.D.—girls didn't play baseball. They sat on the grass and they put their pretty skirts around on the grass. I couldn't deal with it. It was really hard. You do find friends that are like you, though.

I got a horse and rode all over. In fact, I used to ride on a dirt road when Caughlin Ranch was a real ranch and Mayberry was a dirt road. I rode my horse everywhere. I rode in parades. You find your place.

As far as art, it was my first experience at making things, and I loved it. I loved making things. I still had no idea of being an artist. Only men were artists then. Only men did everything then. It was later on when I became a CAAW [Committee to Aid Abused Women] volunteer and a feminist way late in life, that I realized that I could become an artist. That happened after Chuck

retired from the military and my children were grown.

Can you fill in the time between high school and coming to Reno to the time when you started working at CAAW?

I went to the university for two years and went to Berkeley for a semester, but that was so huge I could hardly stand that. There again, there was art everywhere. I took art history classes and I loved it, but it was too much.

I came back here and met Chuck. We married in 1957. He was an ROTC student, so he got his commission as a second lieutenant. We had a child, our first child, and went to Fort Benning, Georgia. He started his military career. We lived in Europe a lot. We traveled. That was a very broadening experience. I think everybody should travel. We traveled around the United States and different places in Europe. When you are exposed to different cultures, you see that everybody counts and everything matters.

He was in two tours of Vietnam, so I lived alone. I had the kids for two years while he was gone. I have three children. We moved back to Reno each time he went to Vietnam. After the second tour, we always battled over whether Vietnam was worth it or not. I was so opposed to the war. I used to put up, when we lived up here in northwest Reno, a sign. I made it out of a bed sheet and hung it on the window. It read, "Give Peace a Chance."

My son Bob was in kindergarten then, and his teacher saw that sign and berated him in front of his class. He tells me that is the reason he became an activist later. I don't know if that is true or not, but that is what he tells me.

So after Chuck's second tour in Vietnam, he resigned his commission and we lived in Reno. He jumped around trying to find his

place in the world, and so did I, working and trying to bring in the income. The kids were getting older and facing college. He sold real estate. Eventually he went back into the active Army as a fiscal and property officer for the National Guard, then later the Director of Veteran Services. He did complete his military career and I got to go back to school. I finished college.

Being a military wife in those days, you had so many requirements. You could not go out in public with your hair put up. In those days we didn't have blow-dryers, so you usually had to walk around till your hair got dry. You could not hang your clothes on the clothesline outside. In Europe you had to get your husband's permission to get a driver's license. We were expected to attend these events, to do what the commanding officer's wife told us to do, and maintain our children. They had to be perfect.

I was so intimidated by the time we got back to Reno, that I was just dead meat. The women's movement had already come. I just read about it and laughed it off until I joined the Committee to Aid Abused Women. I needed to do something. I didn't even think about going to work. It never even entered my mind, but I knew I had to do something. They had just begun. This was in the 1970s.

I remember I was their first volunteer. They had a little office at the Sparks Methodist Church. I remember walking up those steps. It was so dusty and kind of smelly. I walked into this office and Joni Kaiser had a desk—her desk has always been full of papers—and a couch full of clothes that people had donated. That was it. I sat on the couch and she interviewed me while a mouse ran across my foot. [laughter]

It was like another world. I guess I had lived a sheltered life, but I never heard of a battered

woman. I knew people got in fights because my parents did, and Chuck and I fought, but not physically. It was just such an awakening for me. It was awesome. It was awesome to go and rescue women from secret hiding places, to get them to the secret shelter, to maintain a shelter, and to find a way to get funding for it. Oh, my gosh. We had bake sales. We wrapped Christmas... we did everything just to keep the shelter open. It was all women doing this. At that time there was no daycare either for children. It was very empowering to do this. I met Jan Evans there, who eventually started the Nevada Women's Fund, with me and two other women. I just became a feminist.

It was a time where we had to face-down men—aggressive, mean, battering men. It was a time we had to help make laws that would stop abuse, and get restraining orders. It was a time when we did go to the legislature and get permanent funding for CAAW. In a way it is cultural, though. We went around to all the churches to meet with the church women and get them to call their legislators. That is how we got the marriage license bill passed with permanent funding for CAAW. That is how I became a feminist, and it was about that time I was back in college.

I decided I was going to be an artist and I was going to make something that had to do with women's art. My professor, Bob Morrison, who was my major sculpture professor... I didn't know this at the time, but he was just getting a divorce. He did not like women's art. There were no women instructors at the university at that time. The jurors were all men. I minored in journalism and it was the same thing over there.

I used to put stickers over at the Journalism Department that read, "Those who control the news are the ones who report the news." I used to put stickers on *Penthouse* magazine. I can't remember what the stickers said, but

it was something like, "This is inflammatory to women." Eventually they started hiding the covers of *Penthouse* magazines, so something worked. [laughs] I got to be a little bit more of an activist.

Bob Morrison was a great teacher. He was great. I learned everything from him—working in 3-D and how to look at a piece from a higher point of view than just making a basket. I knew better than to make baskets there, because he put down anything that had anything to do with feminism.

I used to read Lucy Lippard's work. I started checking out women artists, like Georgia O'Keeffe of course, Judy Chicago, and some of the others. I read about forms and techniques that were typical of women artists, like layering and hollows. I realized that was what I had been making in my sculptures that Bob didn't like.

By that time I was used to confronting men and talking them down, so I did that with him. I did that with Bob Morrison. I fought with him the whole two years I took sculpture classes from him. He would not even help me to graduate. I had to go see another professor because I had part of my credits from way back in the 1950s and then part of them from the late 1970s or early 1980s. Jim McCormick is the one who helped me get my degree. But Bob did... I mean, I learned everything from him.

When I graduated from college, I had some big major pieces that I made in college. I made huge wind sculptures. I started making things with willow. I loved wood because of my dad. Being in the lumber business, we used to live in the forest. I used to talk to trees. My brother got lost in one once. We used to chew pine needles. Trees were just like people to me.

So after I graduated, not before, I decided I had to something. I had to do something to honor women, but not to hate men. When you

work at Committee to Aid Abused Women, you tend to start hating and suspecting all men. Really, Chuck and I went through some tough times then. If you come out the other side, you want to honor women, and that is what I wanted to do. The only art forms that I could think of to honor women were quilts and baskets, and I never did learn how to sew. I knew the learning curve would be too tough, so I went to baskets.

I found a book. There were no books then in the 1970s. They're all over the place now, but [the book I found] was in Japanese. It was at some sale out in front of Mervyn's, but the pictures were good. That is how I learned how to make baskets.

Later, when I got into galleries, there was a gallery in Scottsdale that thought that I imported the baskets from Japan and then embellished them. I said, "No, that is how I learned to make baskets—in the Japanese style."

That is the long and the short of it, except that at that point other things were happening. The Nevada Women's Fund was starting. I was really active at CAAW. I was board president by then. My father was getting sick. There were just a lot of things happening. I decided if I was going to sit there and make baskets, they had to count for something. So I decided I should sell them.

My husband and I... the kids were gone by then, and we moved out to Palomino Valley. I don't know if you know where that is. It is near Pyramid Lake. We lived on ninety acres and it was so beautiful and peaceful. I think if I hadn't lived out there, I would have been a different person, but I got to live in the beauty of Palomino Valley.

I applied for a show—the Graeagle art show—and I couldn't believe it, but they accepted me. I was still this intimidated person. I just sold everything. Chuck built the

shelves. I didn't know what an art show should look like, so he built all the shelves and I took my baskets out there and put them up. It was horrible. It was very fearful to stand there and watch people come by and look at your work. I thought, "God, what did I do this for?" They eventually bought everything, though.

In fact, from that very first show, Laurel Haines, from Tahoe, invited me to be in her gallery up there. I was so intimidated, I never even called her back; she had to call me. [laughs] So that was my beginning right there—the Graeagle show. I did that show two or three more years and then I branched out into other galleries and other areas.

First I wanted to honor women, and a lot of my work does honor women. I make goddesses and I made all kinds of baskets that were of female-oriented. Baskets are female anyway. I wrote a book about Native American basket weavers, because they're mostly women. They're also an overlooked population, just like battered women. There are so many overlooked people in this world. I was doing all that at the same time I was making these women baskets.

Then I decided, really, Nevada needs to be honored too. Nevada is overlooked too. That is the reason I started entering national shows and making connections nationally. It has just been wonderful meeting these people—these women and men. For the top basket weavers, the majority of them are still men. I don't know why; it just happens. Women, I don't know... maybe they are more of a nurturing kind, although I have two sons that are very nurturing, so that destroys my theory.

Anyhow, it has been wonderful and I still communicate with people. I got to be on the board of the National Basketry Organization. I started Great Basin Basketmakers, and they're about twenty-five years old now. We had our twenty-year reunion about five years

ago. There are two hundred in that group. That has been very fulfilling.

Baskets are ordinary things. They are overlooked. To me they are like a lot of people. They are like how I felt when I first moved to Reno—overlooked and under-appreciated. Baskets really are, though. When you think about it, they go back to the beginning. I'll bet you they made baskets before they made arrowheads. They had to get the berries to the cave. Here we are still needing baskets, still importing them, and just using them for things and overlooking them.

I really wanted to make baskets be special, miraculous things, which they are. They have held babies, they are in ceremonies, they have done everything, and they continue to be overlooked. I don't think the art museum has anything but Indian baskets in their permanent collection yet, although I know the Historical Society has some of mine. Anyway, it is still a thing that needs addressing, as does the entire craft tradition, in my opinion. I think the whole craft tradition is overlooked.

What sort of materials do you like to use in your baskets?

Well, I use everything. At first I used reed. I started out with reed, because I thought that is how the Japanese did it. This basket isn't mine; this is my friend Kathleen's. You can see she used mud and raffia. Gosh, there isn't anything I haven't tried. I've had my husband stop on the freeway to get tire tread out from the freeway and have used it. I have used plastic. You can make a basket with anything. I had a teacher once who made one out of old banana peels and it was beautiful, because they turn black. There isn't anything I haven't tried, I don't think.

I have put Groucho glasses inside of a basket, because you can look at baskets as being outside and inside. There is the outside of the basket that the world sees, just like the outside of a person, and then there is the inside of a basket. I noticed when I would have my baskets in galleries, people always looked inside. They always want to see what is in there. So that got me thinking about what they are looking for.

I started making a lot of baskets with interior stories. My healing baskets always had things that had... that is where the Groucho glasses came in, for humor, and apples that heal people. In fact, I have four healing baskets at Renown. I have a medicine wheel basket and one called "An Apple a Day." The other one is a Nevada sunset, which, to me, is the most beautiful thing in the world.

Besides the Japanese basket weaving book, what other classes or influences have developed your technique?

Well, back to Bob Morrison... as far as my philosophy, in this group of basket weavers there are about three that come from an art background, and the rest are traditional weavers. I love traditional baskets. I buy them. I collect them. There is a different attitude, though, and so I think I started out by thinking about that.

Then what influences have I had... I didn't have any at first, and that is why I started the basketmakers. I really wanted friends and I wanted other people making baskets. About that time groups around the country started forming and people started writing books. I met a woman up in the Northwest called Shereen LaPlantz. She died of cancer several years ago, but she got me started. She put my work in the first book she wrote. She

had a conference and I went up there to the conference.

When my friend, Kathleen Curtis, and I decided we wanted to write a book on Native American weavers, Shereen was the first person I called. She told me just what to do. She said, "You just take a bunch of baskets and you march down to that University of Nevada Press with all those baskets and talk to the director." We did all that. I didn't even know how to use a computer and Kathleen didn't know how to use a camera, so it was a steep learning curve. He told us yes, but we didn't realize it was on speculation.

It was a peak experience for Kathleen and I to write that book, because we traveled around Nevada. We found Native Americans living in silent little places and in beautiful little places. Have you ever been or heard of Lee, Nevada? It looks like the Garden of Eden. It is beautiful. We found Minnie Dick there. She was sitting there in front of her trailer waiting for us with her huge winnowing trays and her rifle right by her ready to shoot. She shot squirrels. That was Minnie, and she was eighty-five years old. We were in sweat lodges with people and we danced in pow-wows. We just learned more things about that culture.

When we finally got the book finished, Kay Fowler from the university advised us a lot and wrote our introduction. She is an anthropologist. Then the Press just held it there for years. By this time, I was pretty well known. I had a great mailing list. I had started the Wild Women about then. I put out a newsletter a couple of times a year. I started a letter-writing campaign to the Press, and I think that is how we got our book published. They deserve it. The basket tradition in the Great Basin is the longest continuing tradition in the United States and possibly the world.

I found this out from an exhibit at the High Desert Museum. Nobody knew it here. That's another beautiful thing about Nevada that nobody knew.

We wrote that book, and it was a highlight. I still exchange Christmas cards with the weavers who are still alive. They're still making baskets all over. A lot of them aren't alive anymore.

I started going to conferences, and that was a great thing. Oh, my gosh, I learned that the sky was the limit then. I didn't even know what the limit was. I thought I had invented the technique of putting paper over a basket and then painting imagery on the paper. I got that idea from the Paiute water jugs that are covered with pinion pitch. Lissa Hunter, a famous basketmaker, was already doing that, though.

It was so fun to meet with her, take a workshop from her, and combine her ideas and my ideas. I got to meet John Garrett and his creative ideas, and learn how to twist wire. I just think the more workshops a person takes... then pretty soon I was teaching them. It just keeps growing.

Basket weavers are such good people. Weavers are, too. I've noticed that. I started weaving... before I wove baskets, I was weaving fabric or yarns and things, and going to those conferences all the time. I went to the conference of Northern California Hand Weavers. I was a member of the Reno Fiber Guild, which is Nevada's oldest guild. I went to those conferences and then went to their national ones.

It is nice to be in Nevada because you're not heavily influenced. You're not going to copy anybody, because there is nobody to copy. On the other hand, you have to leave to get bombarded with new ideas. So for my time... for where I was and for that time in

my life, and for where the world and the art world was, it was perfect for me.

My parents were always very disappointed, really my mother, that I made baskets instead of painted great landscapes. She loved landscapes, and baskets were so thumbs-down. My father, when I wrote a book about Indians, said, "Why would anybody write a book about Indians? You should write a bestseller." [laughs] You can see how success-motivated they were. I had my own way. I'm sure there were a lot of people in that generation and maybe probably in younger ones that feel the same way. Everything came together well, though.

As I was checking dates here, I realized that living in Palomino Valley was a very fortunate thing. It kept me from doing too much in Reno, because I know I would have gotten involved and probably would have gotten a job. I know I would have gotten a job, and then I would not have had time for a lot of other things. I got to do these things.

I consider my husband a great supporter of the arts, because if it hadn't been for him supporting me, I would have never been able to go to college and then earn my own way. I'm lucky that way.

Can you tell me how the ideals of feminism, honoring women, and honoring Nevada are manifested in your baskets? How do you actually communicate that in your baskets?

Well, sometimes I do it just by the techniques. There is a basket over there on the mantel that is made in a soft way, because I love the soft. Sometimes baskets look so hard. I decided to make that soft basket and then I layered it. It is actually woven with paper on the inside and then it's covered with paper. I used to make my own paper and later on I bought it. It is layered again with things on

the outside of it. Then it has a painting of the Nevada sunset on it. The layering is just what women do. We lead layered lives even now. We have many layers in our lives and we multitask in our lives. That one I never sold. I wish I had kept more of them.

A friend gave me back that basket over there because she knew I missed my baskets. It's called "Urn of Concern." That one has an image on the front of it. It shows this woman who is very contemplative and worried about something. It has question-marks all around it. I thought that was perfect for me right now because my husband has Alzheimer's Disease and I'm concerned. Then I have one in the bathroom, right over the toilet. I don't like it in the bathroom.

I did a Goddess series. In fact, I'm going to have a show. It's going to be called *Goddesses*. The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship invited me to have a last show. I just went off of their Arts and Aesthetics Committee.

I'm going to call back all... I made goddesses. I've always made goddesses. I had three big goddess pieces in the museum that talked about the emergence of the goddess in history. I had a central figure in the first piece that was covered. It was totally covered with just arrowheads, male discoveries, and bones around the outside of it. There was also little pieces of willow and a moon, because you always associate the moon with feminism, with the goddess, and with menstruation. I do. I know at one time we all menstruated together. I just love that. I wish it still happened. Well, in fact, I understand it still does in girls' dormitories. It is a miracle. The moon is important and willows are important. I've often had willows in my pieces.

The second piece showed emergence. Marija Gimbutas was an anthropologist. She made the first discoveries that these early-discovered

goddess icons were not, as the male archeologists said, fertility figures, implying that they were sexual figures. They were important religious pieces. They predate any male sculpture ever made. Women were honored because they were the ones, of course, that had the babies. Nevertheless, this is one of the oldest icons—the Goddess of Willendorf. I have the Goddess of Willendorf on a lot of my pieces. I used to buy them from Marta Elliott, who made little fat goddesses, and put them on my baskets.

The piece that is in the bathroom is of Guanyin. She is just the only piece I've kept from my Goddess series. She is a major goddess of compassion and I'm glad I've brought her with me everywhere I go.

I've made a lot of pieces on crosses. They're not exactly baskets. I got pieces of wood, crossed them, covered them, painted them, made images on them, clothed them, and put little ceremonial baskets at the base so you could put little pieces of prayer in there. I'm calling all those baskets back for the U.U. show.

Back to my third museum piece... the second piece had little goddess icons on it. The central goddess figure was starting to become uncovered. The third piece had her completely uncovered. Her arms are spread out in a blessing, and she is covered by moons and willows. She is surrounded by contemporary women's images and sculptures of contemporary women, like the Statue of Liberty.

Somebody bought the second piece while I was teaching a workshop. I wanted to keep all three together. I only have piece one and piece three, so I don't know if it makes much sense without piece two. They're in the garage. They're going to go up there on the wall, but I haven't gotten around to it yet.

I've done Mother Earth and Ma Bell. I did a whole Mother series and a whole Goddess

series. I think women are wonderful. They're sometimes underrated, and I still read that they're underpaid. Isn't that sad? So we're counting on your generation now. I'm sorry I didn't get involved in the feminist movement a lot sooner, but I just didn't. We just thought it was funny, calling a mailman a mail carrier. We just laughed and thought that was so funny. After CAAW, everything changed.

You mentioned you have sold a lot of your baskets. Has that been lucrative?

Oh, yes. There were many years when I could have left Chuck and made my living completely. Yes, it was very lucrative. My work was up in the thousands.

The nice thing that happened, and one reason I have Guanyin, is that it was in a healing arts show at Renown (when it was Washoe Medical Center). Turkey Stremmel discovered it there and she discovered me. She is such a supporter. Earlier, though, I had written Stremmel Gallery a letter. I did this a lot when I was younger. They used to have these local artist shows where they would have two women and fifty-four men. I wrote them a letter and I said I took issue with that. I named the artists they could have invited. I never got an answer.

Later on when Turkey discovered me and I went in there, Pete said, "Well, if isn't the feminist." [laughs] They are very good people and they heeded my letter. They increased their numbers of women artists and they show quite a few women artists now. Turkey discovered me, though.

Donna Antraccoli was with the Hermitage Gallery, which is no more. Between the two of them, they found a lot of public commissions for me. Donna got my things in banks and Turkey got me into all the Harrahs, except Australia. I really wanted to go to Australia.

She started a thing called The Art of Gaming here in Reno, and I got to be one of the four or five artists included in that. Joan Arrizabalaga is another local artist that you've probably heard of. She was one of the artists involved, too. It started there.

The money is really good when you get into corporate. It is not easy to put three-dimensional work in any kind of a corporate setting because of fire regulations. They need wall pieces. So they had to work for me to get my pieces in. I mean, they built these huge stands covered with Plexiglas that probably cost more than the piece of art.

It is a challenge, too. I don't gamble. I don't care if people gamble, but I think it takes money away. It exploits people. It was really hard for me to do those gaming pieces. All I could do is just tuck some sage in each one of them and send out good thoughts to whoever was looking at the pieces. As far as I know, they're still there. That is how I got into the corporate...

The thing that happened to me...I realized later that as my baskets began to hit the market, women were earning their own incomes. It was just serendipitous. I was making things that applied so much to women that were realizing that they, too, were important and they counted. It was affirming who they were. They had income, and I would say maybe 95 percent of my baskets were purchased by women.

As they got so important, I kept raising my prices and they still bought them. I don't think they were worth it. This is what always bothered me—the money thing. I would just as soon give one to somebody that really liked it, and I have done that. In fact, I gave a lot away when I moved. They supported me and I was, in a way, supporting them. The women's movement and baskets just went together. It was perfect.

I realize that this would not be a short list, but what awards and honors have you received for your basketmaking?

Well, I've received Best of Show awards and blue ribbons. I don't think I've won... I don't believe in them. My husband has awards all over the place. He has received everything. He is a distinguished Nevadan. He has everything. You know what? What does it matter? He still has Alzheimer's. What he is is a good man.

I was made one of the top twenty artists of the century by Reno newspapers, but that is about all. I've won basket awards, but what counts to me is if I can make a difference. That letter to Stremmel Gallery, to me, was an award. Those are the things. The little things are what change the world, not the big things, in my opinion. Baskets can change the world and they are very humble things.

Do you have particular baskets or works in general that are really memorable to you?

Well, I described my Goddess Awakening series—the three Goddess Awakening baskets. Every basket that has been a goddess has been important to me, and every basket that I have put a Nevada sunset on, for some reason. As you can see, I still wear the colors. When I put this bracelet on this morning, I thought, "That should be a yellow bracelet. It's not in the sunset." There is something so inspiring about that.

My first baskets told stories. I told the story of the Ghost Dance. I think those story baskets were important too. I always like to make each basket be a one-of-a-kind basket, although I have worked in a series. I did a whole series over the book. I made baskets that had to do with the willow growing red at Yomba.

I've done a variety of things. As far as favorites, maybe the basket on the mantel. Every basket is a favorite. I just wish I had kept some more. I placed too much value on the money, and I was so elated that I could make so much money. I never ever thought I could make money from my own hands.

I've always been a pretty good businesswoman, because my father was a businessman. I learned a lot from him and I worked in his office a lot. So I've always been good at marketing and that kind of thing. The act of creating and getting money for that piece... it stroked my ego so much. I shouldn't have done it, but I did. I sold just about everything.

So I'm looking forward to the show at the Fellowship, because all my goddesses... I have to find all my goddesses and bring them back into one, and I'm going to take a picture. I do have pictures of a lot of things, though.

I made a piece once that was a fishing basket. It was a great big piece and I made a beautiful mermaid right in the middle of it, and covered it. I made fish out of paper. Those are the things that you can make themes with. For some reason that was one of my favorites, and I just met the woman who bought it. I remember that one. I asked her how it was and she donated it to the Historical Society, which is good. I'm glad it is in a good place.

I have one that another friend bought, called "Mother Earth." It is the oddest-shaped basket. She has an arrowhead for a face. That implies to me so much about being a warrior spirit. It has imagery painted around it and texture on it. That is another one of my favorites, and it is in the colors of the sunset.

So I have quite a few. I have one that I made after Al Gore lost, when the Democrats and Republicans... I made a basket out of red and blue, and I called "Red and Blue Make Purple." It was red and blue and it evolved into

purple, hoping that it would be healing, and it was. I wish it would happen again. I wish we wouldn't be so polarized, but we are. I'm no longer making a basket for it.

Can you tell me about the CITY 2000 Arts commission and how you were involved?

Yes. I was part of the commission as an adjunct artist. The people who started it in the 1990s were probably Kathy Bartlett and probably Mark Curtis. I know Howard Rosenberg and some people from the city, including the then Reno city manager, were really involved in it. There was a woman who had a stroke the following year and had to drop out, but she was really involved.

That was about the time when they looked at the Truckee River and decided that we needed to look at the Truckee River, not away from it. That is when this city manager.... The CITY stands for Cultural In The Year 2000, so they were determined to beautify Reno and have Reno be something more than what it had been.

They figured it all started with the Truckee River, so they started with sculptures and beautifying the Truckee River. Then we, of course, had a big flood and it wiped half of those things out a couple years later.

The next thing... this city manager was such a visionary. The City of Reno architect and his wife were on the commission, too. Their idea was to start with downtown Reno and make it not be such a slum. The first building project, which seemed odd, was the parking garage, because before anybody would come downtown, you need a place to park. I thought it was strange and now I see what a wise thing it was. That is that parking garage on Sierra and First Street. They decided it was going to be more than just a garage.

I was on the group that chose the artist. They put out a national search to find an artist

to design that garage. It was so intimidating for me because I was just a lowly artist working alone. I would go to these meetings with all men in their neckties who knew what they wanted. That was still a time when men were relating to men more easily, and I was a little less easy to communicate.

We had two men and a woman artist who had ideas for it. The two men just had 1960s-type sculptures they wanted to stick out in front, and the woman really looked at Reno. Right then we had built the Automobile Museum. She thought that was the one thing that could tie us in, and she had these great ideas. She has spots up the middle where we could put old cars, and she had tire tread... you might not realize what those little designs are in front of it, but they're tire tread. The city manager and I voted for her. When we started, probably the city manager wanted this woman artist. They chose her and I thought she did a great job.

So that really my extent of being on that committee with the Reno CITY 2000 Arts Commission. To stand back and watch it, though, and to watch the theater go up... we were also worried they would decimate the Truckee River, and they didn't do it. Now look at what has happened. It is just amazing what is happened downtown.

So the commission was involved with improving the Truckee River corridor area and adding arts and culture to that area?

Right. That was about it. That was my extent there. It was the same with the Sarah Winnemucca project. I was part of the Nevada Women's History Project. I belonged to it for a long time. Carrie Porter was president. I was the artist then too. I was the artist

because I was the only one making baskets. Everybody else was painting, and I made baskets. For some reason baskets have an appeal to women, and anytime there is a woman running something, they ask me to do something.

Anyhow, we conducted these art and history tours through Nevada. Jim Hulse did the history and I did the art. We were on two buses. That was the first time I recommended the book—Sarah Winnemucca's book. It was out of publication then. Sarah Winnemucca wrote a book back in the late 1800s. That book came on the bus tour, and people actually did start reading it. Nevada Women's History Project realized what a profound thing that was for an Indian woman in the late 1800s to not only start a school... she was a hero. She did all kinds of heroic things which I won't go into here, because that would be another whole two hours. We decided that Sarah Winnemucca should be our next statue, though. We only had one statue in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., [and we decided] that she would be the next.

Carrie is the one who appeared before the legislature and got approval, with no funding. She and others started raising money around Nevada. Schoolchildren, especially from the Native American schools, would put in their five cents and ten cents, and they raised the money.

Meanwhile, Carrie formed a committee, and I was on that committee; Mrs. Kenny Guinn—Kenny Guinn was a former Nevada governor—was on it. Steven High, who was the director of the museum was on it, as was Carrie. A man whose name I can't remember was on the Arts and Culture Committee in Las Vegas to pick an artist. That was quite a traumatic experience and a wonderful

experience, and we eventually picked this Benjamin Victor.

We raised the money and got Benjamin to do part of his work in Carson City. He set up a little studio in a public area at the State Library and Archives, where people could come and watch him work. Native people and Paiute people, because Sarah Winnemucca was Paiute, and even some of her descendants came and would say, "That is not the way she looks. She had more so-and-so." So he listened to them and he created this wonderful statue.

She is swinging along. She is not standing there stonily. She is swinging along with a book in her arm, like she is ready to conquer the world. So that was my experience and my involvement there too. I was there at the beginning and there to choose the artist, just as I was with the CITY 2000 Arts Commission. I went back to the unveiling, though. It was just a very emotional and exciting experience.

How long did the selection process take for the Sarah Winnemucca statue?

It took several months. We put out a national call for artists and received applications from all over the country, including one from Elko, Nevada, who we ultimately didn't choose, and that was sad. Benjamin was just a young guy. In fact, he was late coming to the first meeting because his wife just had a baby. All three of them came, and they'd had a problem parking. He had to come in with the baby and make the presentation. It was quite exciting. We lost all of our formality. All of those meetings were conducted in Carson City, very properly, and everything was recorded. It was just a high point for me.

How long did it take Benjamin to create the statue?

It was a long process. It was a yearlong process, because first they had to create maquettes. We narrowed it down to three people, and they had to create maquettes. We paid each one of them to do that and make their presentation. Then from there, we chose one. So they had to start with one. Benjamin then had to start all over again with a huge piece. So you start in clay and then you go through the process of creating a statue. I would say the whole thing was probably about a year and a half to two years.

Where was Benjamin from?

His brother was from Las Vegas, and his brother saw the ad in one of the Las Vegas publications and sent it to him. He lives in the Midwest someplace, maybe Oklahoma. Since then he has created a couple of other pieces in Reno. He has pieces on Wells Avenue. So he's very popular. He became good friends with the Guinns. He got so he stayed with them, and they just loved him. They made small statues for sale, and I know the Guinns purchased one.

Did he have to completely relocate here while he was doing the work in Carson City?

He did. He moved here and did it. Don't ask me how his wife got pregnant again, but she did. [laughs] She had another baby, so they had two little kids. He was quite a young guy. He wasn't even thirty. That in itself was amazing, to have somebody that young create something that important.

Can you describe the two other artists who did the maquettes?

They were really good. The other two were really good. One of them was Sara Sweetwater from Elko. It was a public thing when we interviewed all three of them. So a lot of her supporters were there and a lot of her supporters wrote to Mrs. Guinn, urging... and to Carrie Porter, who headed up the committee. I was the vice chair and she was the chair, but fortunately she was able to attend all the meetings. You want to choose a Nevada artist, but I don't know, Benjamin's just seemed to have more drama. I just think that the other two were really good. Those decisions are difficult, and maybe with a completely different panel of judges they would have chosen another one.

The other man, whose name I don't remember, was from California, and he had a good piece too. All of those three maquettes are property of the state of Nevada. They're somewhere in Carson City. It's an open thing. They are probably at the State Museum. People can go find them and look at them. They were good, but his just had a touch that... I've gone back to look at it a couple of times. There is no other statue that can touch that one as far as the drama of it, the movement, and larger-than-life quality. She looks larger than life. As a person who's worked with Native Americans for a long time, you know, it's a pleasure to me to see a Native American woman. At that time she was the first. Since then, Sacajawea has joined her, so there is more than one Native American woman now in Statuary Hall. At that time she was the first, so I'm real proud of that.

How long did the fundraising process take? Who provided the funding?

Carrie Porter headed up that project. She was intrepid. Carrie Porter was intrepid. You probably know of Jean Ford. Jean Ford

had headed up the Women's History Project, and she had recently died. She asked Carrie to take over. Carrie was afire anyway. She felt like she was doing this for Jean, and she formed a group of women. The Nevada Women's History Project also has members in Las Vegas. They were able to get some large corporate donations, but Carrie was very proud that most of the donations—they raised \$200,000—were small ones, mostly from schoolchildren and from just ordinary people that sent in money. She was thrilled.

Going back to CITY 2000, what was the Truckee River like before the commission focused on improving that area?

First, the Truckee River was always flooding, so people had really turned their backs on it. You can still see in certain areas, like that area between Center and Virginia, those tall buildings, and just nothing is there. The Riverside Hotel was closed.

Another thing CITY 2000 did... that was when Artown began. Karen Craig started Artown, and it was called Uptown Downtown Artown. So she was a really important component in getting people to look at the Truckee River, because everybody decided it should be at Wingfield Park.

There were buildings on Sierra Street where the theater is. There was the building that used to belong to our attorney, the Sanford Building. Across the street where the Judicial Building is there was a closed-down building that used to be a furniture company. Everything was dead down there—dead and gray—and nobody even hardly looked at the river. It just went through town, kind of like the railroad tracks. It just went through town and was not a pretty place. Nobody ever went downtown except the people that came to gamble, who just stayed in the casinos. So

Reno had become really dead down there. First Street was nothing like it is now. First Street was just closed-up buildings.

So I really commend those people that started that, and I wish I could remember their names. Surely there is something in Reno's history that talks about that CITY 2000, because I really think that was the beginning of the metamorphosis for Reno.

First Street for a while had La Bussola. It seems as though the development of even that little stretch came along with all the other redevelopment.

One thing engenders another. They're not there anymore, are they? The problem is that it takes a while, and I think people go downtown according to what events are going on down there. It takes tourism, too, to go down there, and now that's not too swift. Tourism is down.

It takes a while for those things to catch on, and there are still friends that I have that say they never go downtown, but they should. That is what I tell them. It really is lively down there. It is interesting. They've got that bookstore—the cute little Dharma Books. Of course, there is that coffee shop, everybody goes there. You can't even get a seat in there. Then the rafting... that I thought was a dumb idea, and look at it. It brought people to the river. So I don't know where it's going to go. Now with our economy the way it is, if people don't have the money to spend, they're not going to be able to go downtown and spend it. I'm a little worried now, but hoping we'll pull out of it.

How long were you involved with the commission?

It was in the 1990s. My guess is that those meetings went on for several months. There

again, you have to set your guidelines, say what you want, and then you have to put out a call for artists. It has to be a national call and has to be publicly advertised. All I can say is it probably took maybe six months or so. The same thing—we narrowed the field. I don't like judging. I've been a juror on so many shows and have been entered into many juried shows. The judging is so subjective. I'm happy with the results of the garage and of Sarah Winnemucca, but I don't like it because you always have to eliminate good people.

Do you remember any obstacles or challenges in terms of what the commission was trying to do?

When you start something new like that, you're not going to get a lot of acceptance. You're not going to get a lot of support, and I don't think they did—this one little group of people who probably didn't even know each other very well until they started. I think that would be difficult. Another obstacle is how the Truckee River flooded so much. You never could count on anything going well down there. People just weren't supporting it. People didn't even care about the Automobile Museum. It just seemed to be.... That was a period of time when downtowns across the country weren't necessarily honored for being downtowns. People were moving out to the suburbs and didn't want anything to do with the center cores. Now it's changing, and I think we were lucky to have the right people here to help with our change. Otherwise, it would still be the way it was. It was a pretty sad thing down there.

Was the Reno city government supportive?

I think the Reno city government was very supportive. They really wanted something. In fact, they sponsored it. We had our meetings

there at Reno City Hall, so they were all part of the equation. I don't think the casinos are real happy with it, because it took people out of casinos. Otherwise, if they're not happy and you read letters to the editor and think, "Oh, let them work it out." I don't think people cared, really. It just took those dedicated souls to stay with it.

I remember the first Uptown Downtown Artown, as they called it. It was so moving. I was so thrilled, and nobody said anything. I can remember I finally said, "I'm writing a letter to the editor." I did, because nobody even said, "Great job." It just happened and life went on. Look how that has grown to a month-long thing. So, just in general, I don't think people cared one way or the other. Life was happening, and who cared.

Sometimes I think when you stand in one place, too... it seemed like most of these people, except for Mark Curtis, came in from the outside. This Reno city manager was from somewhere else. Karen Craig was from Los Angeles. Kathy Bartlett, I think, came in. So, when you've been in one place for a long time, you just accept it the way it is. If you haven't left, you accept just what is and you don't want change. You want your life the way you want it. It just takes time and enthusiasm, and it's all changing.

I know you've been involved in writing, editing, and have been featured in different books. Can you tell me about that?

Well, I'm a basketmaker, or I should say I was a basketmaker. My hands now have been so damaged over the years that I can hardly unscrew a jar or a lid, darn it. I still want to make baskets.

I did gain some sense of being well known here. My idea was to put Nevada on the map.

Nobody ever remembers Nevada. If you look at even the national weather forecast, they never cover Nevada. They skip right over it. I think Nevada is this great, undiscovered wonderful state, so I decided that there has to be an artist representing Nevada. That is when I started entering shows, and I'm still on a lot of lists, even though I don't make baskets anymore.

I have been covered in a lot of books. For this big one, *500 Baskets*, it was a real honor to be in that one. When they did *The Year of American Craft*, they did a big national movement called Craft in America. They contacted all the arts councils in all the states. They asked for two representatives from each state to talk about the beauty of crafting. Craft has always been my ideal. I've always liked the work of the common person. I think it is what beauty is.

Anyway, I got to be one of the ones selected. Dennis Parks from Tuscarora and I were two artists who were selected to represent Craft in America, so I did get covered in the book. Out of that, the Nevada Arts Council formed our own Craft in America Committee. We mounted these craft shows that traveled. It was quite an exciting time for craft in Nevada. So that's how that happened.

The other book that I'm really proud of is the one I wrote, called *Weavers of Tradition and Beauty*, published by the University of Nevada Press. When I realized how difficult it was to make a basket, you associate basketweaving with... underwater basketweaving is what they laugh about in terms of people taking it in college if they need a quick credit. When I realized how difficult it was, I noticed... I went to a show at the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon, and they were talking about Great Basin basketry being the longest continuing tradition in the United States, and

Kay Fowler said it possibly is in the world. Dr. Kay Fowler is an anthropologist, now retired from the University of Nevada. I was so moved by that, and nobody knew. Nobody who lives here, outside of the archeologists, knew the importance of this Native basket tradition in our state.

I told my friend Kathleen Curtis, who is also a basketmaker, and she and I decided to write a book. Now, I've never written anything before. I was going to be the author and Kathleen was going to be the photographer. So I bought my first computer and she bought her first camera, and then we didn't know what to do. We decided we wanted the University of Nevada Press to publish it, because we knew it would continue after us, but we were too afraid to go talk to them and didn't know what to do. I called a friend of mine, who is a basketmaking friend up in Washington, Shereen LaPlante. She said, "You just take a load of Indian baskets, you just march right up there, make the appointment with the director, and make your proposition."

We took a big load of baskets, because we're collectors, and he said yes. Rick Stetter was the director then. He said, "Yes, it would be a good idea."

Well, we thought that meant, "Yes, we'll do your book." Of course it didn't. We found that out much later after we wrote it. That was an odyssey. We had to find work. We drove our car all over northern Nevada looking for basketweavers. We found them and lived with them—we stayed there. We just learned everything Native American. We sweat in sweat lodges; we danced. The experience of writing this book was just the high point of my life, outside of having children, I think. I still respond with the weavers who are covered in it, the ones that are still alive. We still write.

We got it all together, put it into chapters, went back to see Rick Stetter, and first he said, "How many pages is the book going to be?"

I didn't know what he was talking about, how many pages. I can't translate a typewritten page into a page number. We knew nothing. Kathleen's pictures weren't all completely clear. Some of them were kind of blurry. We did turn it in, though, and had a great editor, Sarah Malea. She helped us work it out, make it work, and then we began the wait. The University of Nevada Press is not in any hurry. I know that there were a couple of books that came in were published, and were out while ours was still in the hopper.

At that point in my career, I was putting out a monthly or maybe every-other-month newsletter, so I started a writing campaign myself for people. People wanted to read this book. We started a letter-writing campaign to the University of Nevada Press. Everybody was writing them, asking when they were going to publish this book.

So they finally got with it and had readers read it, and it was finally published. It's not like we're making tons of money. We say we're going out to McDonald's one of these days on our profits. But it is there and it is gone into a reprint now, so we're just so proud of that. Kathleen has since moved to California, but we still are on email. I think it's quite an accomplishment.

The Native people are so here, so present, and so proud of their traditions. I mean, there are so many good Native people. We even met Indian people whose Native language was their own Shoshoni language. They were born here in this state speaking English with an accent, so that was very mind-blowing. It was quite an experience and I'm very proud of it.

Are there any other books you were involved with that you feel are important to mention?

I've been covered in a lot of books, but the only other one I need to mention is that I decided to write... Kathleen and I, when we started emailing one another, decided that the world is always trying to improve us. "You're too fat. You're too thin. You're too tall. You don't know enough about that subject to talk about it." There are all these things about how you could better yourself.

We decided that we need to affirm people as they are, not as we wish they would be. So we began to end our emails with a blessing—every email. They were not really religious, but it was our Native American influence and our blessings. Nature played a big role in them. May you be so and so....

After several years of this, I thought, "We've got to put this in a book and make it a basket of blessings." Kathleen wasn't interested. She gets migraines and she was worried about her health. I thought, "Okay, I'll do it." So I did. I self-published this book called *A Basket of Blessings*, and that's my basket on the cover. Nancy Pepin did all the setup work and all the designing work. She is the one who sent it away and had it typeset, and figured out how to get a hole in there so it looks like a basket handle.

I didn't know how many to order. Right there, Nancy didn't advise me because I think she probably got paid according to how many books I ordered. So I ordered way too many books. I figured if there were 220,000 people in Reno, surely I could sell 15,000 books. [laughs] I've still got some books in a warehouse. That was several years ago. Actually, I just delivered thirty of them yesterday to a gift shop, so they're still selling and people are still ordering them. They sell them at the Nevada Museum of Art. It sits on its own little stand like that. It

is just a little thing that I don't regret, because I do think that sometimes we don't affirm ourselves enough.

It is also a calendar. There is a blessing a day.

Yes, it's a perpetual calendar. The thirty that I delivered day before yesterday was to the Purple Avocado in Carson City. They go through those books like crazy. I've had them at Rancho San Rafael Gift Shop. I've had them a couple of other places. Of course the basketmakers all buy them and give them to their friends. I just had a call yesterday to send two to somebody, so I have to do that. I will be glad when they're gone, though. I don't want my kids to have to deal with those baskets when I'm gone. When we lived in our other house, I had the basement just stacked with these boxes. My studio stacked. Really, I've gone through them all. In fact, I don't have any here now. I have to go get some more. So that's good; they're still going.

Can you tell me about the Note-Ables and how you've become involved with them?

The Note-Ables is a musical group and maybe a performing group that brings these musical opportunities to people with disabilities, adults and children. I got involved because I have a brother with a cognitive disability and he loves to sing. He always lived at home and was highly protected by my great mother and father. They lived in San Francisco. When they died, he lived with us for a while and I realized that he had so much potential that he had never used. I started looking around to try and find things in Reno.

I found the Center for Independent Living, and we went over there. A woman named Manal Toppozada was teaching classes. She's a musician, a violinist, and a

music therapist. She started a group there at the Center for Independent Living—just a performing group—and Steve, my brother, finally joined it. He loved it. It is just amazing what people with disabilities are capable of. They started composing their own pieces.

So for Steve's fiftieth birthday, he had a big birthday party at Bavarian World and invited the Note-Ables to sing at it. Instead of presents, he asked people to bring a donation. With the money they made over those donations—it was a couple hundred dollars—Manal decided to start a nonprofit organization and she called it the Note-Ables. She formed a board of directors, and I was president of the board. Steven is now in his sixties, so it has been going for about ten to twelve years.

It's incredible what Manal has done with that organization. She has three or four employees now. She covers the complete basement of McKinley Arts and Culture Center. That whole ground floor is all Note-Ables stuff. She has a performing group, she has private lessons, she has an exploring music group, and she has a drum circle. They have so many things going.

When you see a person who hasn't spoken in years start to sing, it just brings you to tears. Music is really something that we should all be doing. We should all be singing. That is what she tells us. In fact, my husband now has Alzheimer's Disease and he is taking a singing class at the Note-Ables. They have performances every year. He performed at McKinley. He stood up there on stage and sang "God Bless America" and didn't forget a word. His voice was so beautiful. There again, it makes you cry. So it's an important group and it's growing.

I don't know how many hundred... I don't know if they call them clients, students, people, members, or what they call the people that they work with. They now have a major fundraiser every year at the Atlantis, which

is a big supporter of theirs. They have a big singer and the Reno Jazz Orchestra.

Those first years we worked really hard, but now it has a good volunteer program and they have a lot of community support now. It's a going group. I think they're doing fine.

When it first got going and you were on the board, what other people were involved in terms of the board and volunteering?

Well, I remember Christi Cakiroglu. She is now and was then just starting a new group of her own called Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful. Now look at what it's doing. She was on the board. Also, Jeanine Mooers. Stuart Golder is on the advisory board now. So am I, as is Christy. Kate... I can't remember her last name, but there were maybe six or seven of us on the board. I can remember Christy and I worked so hard on that fundraiser at the Atlantis.

The first public performance they did... it was just a performing group then. There were just a few people in the performing group; there is a blind woman, Jeanine Mooers, who is a music graduate of the University of Nevada. She has a beautiful voice, so her voice kind of carried the group. My brother Steve is all over the place, but he loves to sing and he's a performer, so he throws his arms out and does all those things. There was a man with a brain injury, Boyd Sharp. Every adult in that performing group has a story and they're remarkable people.

We had our first performance at Harrah's in Sammy's Showroom, and we worked like crazy to sell tickets to that. We got a pretty good attendance. Manal had her guitar, Jeanine played her piano and sang, and the whole group sang and just brought the house down. At the end of that performance... there is a family called the Roberts family. He was

a doctor in town, and he is retired now and has two sons and his wife, Jean. They had formed a foundation, and I think they gave us a \$30,000 grant, and that was the seed money for us to really go into full gear. The Roberts Foundation, in fact... we honored that family last year at our fundraiser. They are the ones that got us going.

I know another person that was on the board is Scott Faulkner. He is with the Reno Chamber Orchestra. He is the head of it. My son, Bob, is on it now—on the advisory board. He gets roped into everything I get roped into. [laughs] It goes both ways, because he is roping me into protesting.

Did the Note-Ables start out at the Center for Independent Living and grow into McKinley?

Yes, they started out at the Center for Independent Living. They could no longer stay there because they only had one room. The Center for Independent Living has so many activities, there wasn't a place for them. They then moved to PLAN. PLAN had a big meeting room, so they met there for a while. They then grew beyond that and moved to one room at McKinley. McKinley isn't really accessible, though. In order to keep... to be a historical building, they couldn't make it completely accessible. If a person in a wheelchair wants to get in the door at McKinley, they have to ring the doorbell and somebody has to come and open it. That is still an ongoing thing, and that bothers me somewhat. I don't like it, because we have one woman in a wheelchair who sometimes is out there shivering in the cold. It bothers me.

It was very interesting, because for their first meeting in McKinley, Manal was late. I heard this from my brother; I wasn't there.

It was their first rehearsal. So the guys—the performers—all got there and they were so thrilled to be in this new place. They went downstairs and they were sitting around just laughing and talking, and so happy. It's like you're an adult now. You're not confined, and nobody's judging you.

Well, the director and the employees upstairs—there were three of them—were horribly worried about what was going on with “those people down there.” They came down and bawled them out, made them keep still, made the boys sit over there, the girls sit over there, and not talk until Manal arrived.

It has since totally changed, because one of the missions of the Note-Ables is to bring an awareness to the general community that people with disabilities have feelings and love just like all of us do. Manal had quite a mission educating not only the people at McKinley, but the whole community of Reno, which she still does. It is so amazing to go to their fundraiser at the Atlantis, because it's a dance, too, and you'll see people out there dancing in wheelchairs. Channel 4 is our supporter. Shelby Sheehan is the emcee, and they love her. She brings her little boy along. The guys are always asking her to dance and she just dances with every one of them. It's just wonderful to see people with disabilities out on that dance floor along with people like Chuck and I, with just anybody dancing all together. To me, that is what a community should be.

My brother, after he joined the Note-Ables, decided that he wanted to live on his own. This is how empowering music can be. He moved out. Of course, he had to have a trainer. He got a job. I think it was his first job. He got a job, got his own place, started volunteering at St. Mary's Hospital, and started riding the bus. He became a fully

actualized human being, and that's what the Note-Ables has done for so many people. I am so sold on that organization.

The other one is VSA Arts. They started long before the Note-Ables did. They started, oh, my gosh... they might have started in the 1990s, by a woman named Kathy Sederquist. She wanted to bring visual arts to people with disabilities, so Kathy started, working out of the Sierra Arts Foundation, setting up these art programs for people with disabilities. Her way of doing it was to bring them together at certain times of the year, not all the time. For Manal, her programs are ongoing. Kathy, with VSA Arts, works out of... they have gatherings usually at the Pioneer now, although they have a new building of their own and they have a new work building of their own.

In the early days, when I worked for Kathy as an artist, they sent us out, and I went out to [Marvin] Picollo School and had residencies out there. I don't know if they still do that or not. When I was on the board of directors, I don't think they were doing it. Kathy eventually retired, and Mary Ellen Horan took it over, and she has run VSA Arts just like a business. She has bought the building. They own the Lake Mansion. Not only that, they owned it when it was over at the Coliseum. You don't call it the Coliseum anymore. She insisted on keeping it. They didn't want it there anymore when they enlarged over all that property, so she did the fundraising to have it moved. It was moved by trailer right down Virginia Street and right over to its present location. Mary Ellen did all that fundraising.

They have workshops now downstairs and they keep going in a good way. They've broadened their client base, so they take people with and without disabilities because the new theory is to integrate. I'm not on that board any longer. I jump in and out.

When you were involved with Picollo School, what was that program like?

I was working with paper then. I was influenced by the Paiute water jugs, and I decided to put paper over baskets. I did that a lot in those years and painted them. I was making my own paper and I was making my own papier-mâché.

So when Kathy invited me to do these residencies at Picollo School, I thought that would be perfect for them, so I did. I got way too ambitious, but I was younger then. So we did these major figures. We did a huge cowboy and a cowgirl out of papier-mâché. Those kids had more fun piling that paper onto that chicken wire frame. They were so happy.

A teacher from one of the classrooms of the more severely disabled students said, "Please won't you come to my room? Please." I knew they weren't capable, because they were severe, both physically and mentally. I did get some papier-mâché—clay-type papier-mâché—and Popsicle sticks, which I know now is highly dangerous. I didn't know that. I didn't think of it. Those kids had more fun squeezing... you don't have to make anything; you just have to get your hands into something.

There was one little girl in that class who had never spoken. I don't know what you say when you can't talk. She made this... she kept patting and patting this lump, and then she stuck some Popsicle sticks in it and sang "Happy Birthday." The teachers cried. I didn't know what they were crying for; I did later when they told me. So there you go. There is the power of art. That was another peak experience. That is mostly what I did out there.

It is hard when you don't have any training. I knew my brother, but I'd never had

any training. Maybe it's just as well, because then you behave as if you're just speaking with any other child. Maybe it worked out just as well. That was really my experience there.

I taught with them for a long time. I did paper things with them for a long time and many other projects. Those kids always surprised me. They didn't follow the rules, and sometimes when you don't follow the rules you do so much better than when you do follow the rules. I always loved it. As many years as I worked with them as an artist, I just loved that. I think they've done a wonderful job. I don't know how they're doing now. I don't read much about them, but I'm sure they're going on strong.

What kind of responsibilities did you have as a board member of Note-Ables and VSA Arts?

They're much larger. I prefer the hands-on things, but sometimes when you're in a director mode, you get to help set the policy for the entire organization. I did love that, especially with the Note-Ables. VSA Arts had been established for so long before I became a board member, and VSA Arts was more director-driven, whereas Note-Ables is more of an equal role between the board and director, so it's a different way of making decisions.

With VSA Arts, I mean, Mary Ellen always had all the answers. You couldn't come up with a better idea, because she had tried so many things and had the ideas. We did go to board meetings and we did approve things and we had suggestions and helped her, but I would say it was more director-driven. The Note-Ables was a fledgling organization and being on that board... we actually met at the Children's Cabinet because Stuart was working there at the time, so there was a place for us to meet. So for that organization we got to help set policy.

It was the same with Committee to Aid Abused Women; I wrote the personnel policies for the Committee to Aid Abused Women. That stuff goes over into the other. Once you're on one board, you develop this way of communicating. With ideas, if they haven't already been brought forward, you can contribute what you already know. So we set a lot of policies at the Note-Ables and were willing to change too. They still are. They work too hard, in my opinion. [laughs]

The Note-Ables are having a problem right now defining themselves, because the Note-Ables, when it first started, it was just the performing group of about nine people. They were called the Note-Ables. Then the whole organization is also called the Note-Ables, so they're struggling with how to redefine what they are.

They're going to be performing at the first Farmers' Market. They're everywhere. They were at Earth Day. I was there with them, making musical instruments out of recycled things. They branched out. They've been to Carson City. They went to Las Vegas. They've been to Fallon to perform. They perform for different organizations. The Elks Club and those kinds of clubs often invite them, and then they donate. There are groups of people with disabilities, like People First, and they might invite the Note-Ables to perform. They perform at university functions. The university has been real good supporters of the Note-Ables.

They've been all over. They've been to every casino showroom in Reno. That is how much they've performed. They performed once at the Nevada Women's Fund because they were the recipient... Manal is a grant writer, so oftentimes the foundations that give grants invite them to come perform. So they're pretty well known around Reno.

So there is the performing group, but they've also expanded into classes and groups.

Yes. Classes, drum circles, and they have what they call Exploring Music. Those are the beginners who want to sing. Then they have all these private lessons. They have also gone and taught at Camp Lotsafun, which is a camp for people with disabilities. They've performed there. What they do is they encourage everybody in the audience to join in, and they have rattles and things they pass around. Pretty soon everybody in the whole building is doing something.

I haven't been to a drum circle, but I understand they're really fun, because the parents and whole families come to those, so those should be fun. They do a wide variety of things. They're busy.

Like I say, Manal also performs in the Reno Chamber Orchestra and in the Reno Philharmonic, and she teaches at the university. It is a good thing she's young, that's all I can say. She has Wendy Firestone working with her now, and Wendy used to be with WARC. Then when they went through their merging, she came over to the Note-Ables. Wendy has started dance groups. It's so charming to see those girls and boys. Wendy knows where to get the costumes. I should say men and women. They're just beautiful in their costumes, and it is beautiful music. They swirl around the floor. There is something so heartwarming about that.

How supportive is Reno in general of the Note-Ables?

The Note-Ables has a mission to educate the community, and I think they've done a pretty respectable job of it. As people learn more about them, they support them. I think they're

becoming pretty mainstream. It has been a very big step for Reno. It's so inclusive. They have people of color; they have people of all abilities and disabilities. All that to be integrated... it is what we all strive for, at least what I do.

My husband was a career military man, so we moved. We were always in the army living on different army posts, so wherever we lived, we were integrated. Our children went to school with people of all colors, and they were our neighbors and our friends. It's so strange to come back to Reno and have it be separated. The Note-Ables, I think, is doing a wonderful job in that mission of bringing everything back together again. All in all, it's been pretty good.

You mentioned your involvement in the Shadow Project. Will you tell me about that?

I've been an activist ever since Chuck left the army. You're not supposed to do those things when you're an officer's wife, but after he left the army, I just started. I started with the Committee to Aid Abused Women, and had my first protest with them on the steps of the old Pioneer Theater auditorium.

After that, I just started doing activist things. One was the Shadow Project. I read about it in some art magazine. It was a national movement to commemorate Hiroshima Day. The idea was to get shadows of people and put their shadows in public places, and to do it in the night, so that when people woke up and came to work in the morning, they would see those shadows. Hopefully they would realize what that annihilation must have been like in Hiroshima.

There was some big Earth Day... it must not have been Earth Day, but there was some kind of a gathering at Wingfield Park. I got some heavy plastic rolls, got people to stand

there, and I outlined their shadows. So we had all these outlines of shadows and then I cut them out. I enlisted some artists to help me. I remember Ingrid Evans specifically. I was so surprised at her, because it seemed out of her area. There were, oh, maybe eight or ten artists.

We met at... it was about ten or eleven o'clock at night, and we got this paint that would wash away, it was called whitewash. We would unroll these pieces of shadows and put paint around the outside of them and then lift up. When you'd lift it up, then there would be the outline of what a shadow would be like... what it would have been like if somebody had a bomb dropped on them—a nuclear bomb or an atomic bomb.

We did that all over downtown Reno and we separated. We went into groups and separated, and then we met later. We were stopped by the police a couple of times, but we just kept going. We met late at Deux Gros Nez. It was open all night at the time. We just laughed and had more fun. The next morning when people went to work, there were big shadows on the Post Office steps, on the Courthouse, and all around on businesses. It was quite a moving thing. I only did it one year, but it was nice to be part of a large movement like that. Cities around the country were doing it. It was in the newspaper. It was fun. I've been doing those kind of things ever since, I think partly because I missed out on so much during the 1960s. We were overseas during the Freedom Train rides and the feminist movement. I missed out on those, so I guess I'm still making up for it.

How would you describe the Reno art community?

It is blossoming right now. It used to be there was a separation between the

university. The university staff there kept themselves separate from the rest of the art community, and they were somehow better. They would look down their nose at the rest of the artist community. I determined, when I started the Basketmakers, we weren't going to be like that; we were going to be supportive. If somebody had an idea, that was great.

There also used to be a big division between art and craft. The Nevada Artists Association had a very difficult time taking craftspeople in. I still don't think they do, but I don't know about that. That is all but disappeared, and now students coming out of university are forming these great little groups. They're having this NadaDada and Printmakers Conspiracy. It makes me wish I were younger so I could get involved all over again, because those were fun days.

I was a returning art student, so I didn't graduate from college until about the time my daughter did. Polly Peacock was an older student, too, and I remember she and I used to just get together and want to do art projects, and we would try to get people together. We wanted to start something, and we did start a group called Connections, which is still going on. Polly and I wanted to change the world in some way. She's still just making art like crazy and I'm just talking about it.

I think there is a lot of hope for the arts in Reno. The idea now is that anything goes, and the Artist's Co-op is a good example. People still love the wonderful work that's coming out of Stremmel Gallery. It's still always voted the best gallery in Reno, and it is. It's got great stuff. People are inventing new things all the time, and we've got a great museum that gives lessons and has lectures. Those are things that we didn't have before. I think there is nowhere to go but

up. The entire arts community, the music community, the singing, and the whole thing... I just have high hopes as long as we can support all of it financially.

Are there any advantages to being an artist in northern Nevada?

There are disadvantages, in that when I was real active, I didn't have a support system. That is why I started the Basketmakers. Those are the disadvantages—there is miles and miles between you and whoever you wanted to be with, talk to, or be influenced by.

The big advantage—and somebody from the Bay Area told me this—is you're so lucky to live where nobody else is doing anything. You can come up with your own ideas and you're not going to be copying what everyone else is doing. She said "That's what we do here. We just all do the same thing." She was right. There is an advantage to being here, in that it's an independent kind of a state anyway, so we're all a little bit rugged individualists here. We don't just follow the mainstream. We just strike out on our own, even when we're together, and we honor that in other people. I think there's a great advantage to being an artist here.

Generally speaking, how supportive is Reno of the arts and culture?

In my experience, now that I'm out of it a little bit, since I'm retired from making baskets, I think they've been pretty supportive. I've always just had the best support not only from businesses, but from galleries. They don't even compete against each other. I know I've worked with Donna Antraccoli with Hermitage Gallery to get stuff in Reno. I've worked with Turkey Stremmel and Stremmel Gallery to get stuff in Reno, and they don't

compete against each other. I think the artists that I've known and met when I was doing The Art of Gaming at Harrah's... I was a little bit intimidated being part of that project, but they were so kind. I think it's great. What do I know? All I know is my own little circle, and I've just always been determined not to think... if we don't think we're better than anyone else, then we'll get done what we need to get done. Once we start getting exclusive, it's not my idea of art, as an artist.

Specific to art and culture, over the years, what notable changes, shifts, or trends have you seen?

Golly. I went to Reno High School here, and I don't think there was anything. I can remember taking art at Reno High School, but I couldn't find anything outside of the YWCA where anybody could even go make art anyplace.

There was the Artist's Co-Op then, and that is the longest continuing cooperative in the state. They had just strictly paintings. Now look at them. They've blossomed into everything, and they have some of the tops... they have the best variety and the top artists from everywhere, and that place is going like gangbusters now.

My parents weren't involved in the arts at all, so I don't know if they had they had the Nevada Opera or the Reno Phil. I don't think they had any of that then.

When we moved back to Reno after Chuck and I married in college and left... when we moved back to Reno, it wasn't what it was now. There just wasn't the excitement. Artown has just started so much. Artown and the Riverside Artist Lofts, those two things... Pat Smith with Sierra Arts was the one that got that vision. I think that between the Riverside, Artown, CITY 2000, and the university... they've changed a lot too. I can remember

being so bitter... the university has changed completely, too, and they've gotten new faces in there. Jim McCormick was always just a great person at the university with the Art Department up there. He wasn't only printmaking; he was everything. He was the common man. He was the only one, though, in my opinion.

Now they just seem to be producing some great students with some very creative ideas. Those students are coming out of there and really taking their art seriously. Some of the stuff they're doing I don't think is selling, but maybe it is. I hope it sells, because that is the trouble. You need money. To be a working artist, you need to be paid, and that's where it stops. You can't get too creative because nobody wants to buy it. They seem to be striking a happy medium, though, and it seems everywhere you look, there are things happening in Reno now.

I'm glad to be witnessing it, because it's been a long time coming and there have been a lot of people along the way who've made it happen.

MARTHA GOULD

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me about where you were born and where you grew up?

Martha Gould: I was born in a small mill town on the Sugar River, where the river goes into the Connecticut River in Claremont, New Hampshire. I grew up and went to school in Claremont. My mother actually was born in Europe and came to this country in her early teens. My father was born in the Lower East Side in New York City, but his family eventually ended up in Claremont, New Hampshire. I went to school in Claremont. My parents were absolutely adamant that my sister and I be well educated and go to college. We did, and that is really it.

My parents were multilingual. My mother spoke Polish, Russian, Yiddish, Lithuanian, and English. My father spoke German, Yiddish, English, a smattering of Russian, and also a French Canadian dialect called Canuck, because we had a lot of French Canadians who lived in Claremont. However, my parents were absolutely determined that my sister and I would be Americans, so they would only allow

English to be spoken in the house. If I have any complaint about my parents, it is that they didn't expose us to other languages that they spoke.

My sister and I went to school. We both matriculated at the University of Michigan. After I graduated from University of Michigan, I worked for not quite a year at the Baker Memorial Library at Dartmouth College, which is only twenty miles from my hometown. I then went to graduate school and became a librarian.

In any of the schools that you went to, including University of Michigan, were there any art or music programs?

Oh, absolutely. We had formal art classes starting in junior high up through high school. We had an orchestra and a marching band. I played percussion instruments in both the orchestra and the marching band. I sang in the choir and in the a cappella choir. I sang with a choral group both when I worked at the Baker Memorial Library at Dartmouth College and when I was in graduate school.

Music and the arts were very important to my family. People thought my parents were a little strange because they took us to concerts. The Metropolitan Opera Saturday morning was sacrosanct in our household. I can remember my father coming down to Boston to go to see and hear Boris Godunov at the old Boston Opera House (which no longer exists—I think the Hancock Building was built on that site).

Music and art were very much a part of the curriculum that we had in school. Though I didn't take much in the way of art classes when I was at the University of Michigan, I was active in a children's theater group. At the University of Michigan you had to have, as a graduation requirement, two semesters of speech. Dr. Robertson, who was my speech instructor, also had a children's theater group, so I was very active in that for a few years.

I guess you could say that I had the benefit of an old-fashioned classical education. Foreign languages... I had Latin, French, and Spanish starting in junior high all the way up through high school. What worries me in terms of what is happening now is the idea that we have to really zero-in on the sciences and math. We are forgetting that there is another side to the coin—cultural activities are very important for anyone who is going to be a well-rounded person.

What did being involved in the children's theater entail?

I worked with the kids, helping them when they were learning their roles. I did makeup and costumes. It was mostly behind the scenes.

We also had a theater group in high school, and we put on plays. I remember when I went back East for my sixtieth high school reunion, we were looking at our high school

alumni yearbook. I had forgotten that I had been in the junior play and the senior play. Of course, that was sixty years ago.

During your childhood, were there specific musical traditions that you were introduced to?

My father and mother were both very much fans of classical music, so it was mostly opera and classical music. We had something called the Columbia Concert Series back then. We had tickets both to go to concerts up at Dartmouth as well as concerts that were held in the auditorium at the high school. It was mostly classical music.

What brought you to Reno?

We had our own business in L.A., but we were tired of the smog and the hassle. We were looking to relocate somewhere, and we came up here on a skiing vacation. A classmate of my husband's from the UNR College of Journalism, that Arthur met during his master's at UCLA, was working at the university. Arthur went up to talk to him and they offered him a job. He had been a stringer... actually, he had worked for ABC. He had helped ABC open their West Coast national news operation. After the Kennedy assassination, when he came back from Dallas, he said to me, "You know, it was madness." He was very upset at the way the Fourth Estate behaved. He said, "This isn't for me." So, he left ABC.

We opened our own business and did industrial and educational films. He did documentaries and news as a stringer for ABC and NBC in L.A. He was offered a part-time lectureship in broadcast journalism for the old College of Journalism (before it became the J School), and ended up working full-time in agriculture communications. Eventually it was the entire university... It all came together.

We took a long hard look at where we were, and we figured we'd close the business because the business was my husband's. I resigned from the Los Angeles Public Library. We figured if I didn't go back to work and if Arthur just had the part-time lectureship, we still bought ourselves five years of comfortable living. We figured something would happen in those five years, and it did. He became full-time and eventually a tenured professor at the university. I ended up first at the State Library doing legislative research and then at the Washoe County Library for twenty years.

Prior to coming to Reno, while you were in L.A., were you participating in cultural activities?

We used to go to theater, the Philharmonic, Opera... we did go to theater. Arthur and I made several trips back East to New York to indulge ourselves in Broadway.

Did you have any hopes or expectations about cultural activities in Reno?

Actually, we had looked into things available in Reno. We knew there was opera and there was Reno Little Theater. We did quite often go down to San Francisco for theater or for opera. Way back then, though, that is all we had. Since then, the cultural scene in this community has exploded. We were very involved with the start of, what is now, the Reno Philharmonic back in the days of Gregory Stone. We joined the Opera in 1973 and we have been members of the Opera ever since.

What were your other general impressions of Reno when you first arrived?

Well, actually, Arthur had been up here on assignment and had fallen in love with

the area. I really had no expectations when I came here. I did walk into the downtown library and was just blown away. I thought it was wonderful. Margaret Turner was the children's librarian, and she and I became very good friends. Through Margaret, interestingly enough, my husband and I were involved in the very beginnings of what is now Channel 5. It was a long time ago. I can remember going to the early meetings when they were just getting their act together.

I will tell you about the status of libraries in the state of Nevada and in Reno at that time. I can only say it was a culture shock for me. That was then and this is now, and a lot has happened over the years. Joan Kerschner, who is the retired state librarian, and I had a lot to do with bringing libraries into the twentieth century as well as into the twenty-first century. I had no preconceptions, though.

We were members of Reno Little Theater for many years and we supported the Philharmonic when Gregory was getting it started. Those were very rough early years, but it has grown. Nevada Opera is struggling right now, but then regional operas all over the country are struggling. The Philharmonic is doing very well. I don't belong to the Symphony now, but I do belong to the Reno Chamber Orchestra. I'm very fond of chamber music. We belong to the Broadway Series as well.

You said that the first few years of the Symphony were of tough. What was happening that made it tough?

Well, it was just getting something new to Reno up and running. We are very fortunate in this town that we have a large body of trained musicians to call on. That goes back to when they had live orchestras in the showrooms, before everything went digital.

Did you attend casino shows?

Oh, yes. We went to shows in the showroom at the Nugget and at Harrah's. Not often, though. It was usually a special occasion.

Do you remember some of the performers?

Danny Thomas, and a flamenco guitarist—Charo. She is a very fine guitarist. I saw Sammy Davis Jr.

Do you remember how well attended the shows were?

Oh, they were very well attended. I think it was a combination of locals and tourists. This was the heyday. This was pre-Indian gaming. People flocked to Reno from the Bay Area, from Washington, and from Oregon. We had wonderful shows in the headliner rooms. That was then and this is now, and it is very sad.

How long were the shows?

Around ninety minutes. Many of them were just headliners like Lou Rawls, Sammy Davis Jr., and Charo. I haven't been to a casino show in years. We did go several times to *Hello, Hollywood, Hello* at the old MGM Grand, especially when friends came to town. We also had friends who were in the show. Mike Eardley and his wife were dancers in the show. Mike now has Tanglewood Productions. He can tell you a lot about the old days of *Hello, Hollywood, Hello*.

Rosie and Yanish Corda were the other couple. Rosie and Yanish, I think, are both retired. When the show closed, Yanish went to work in the casinos and eventually became a pit boss. I can't remember what Rosie did.

Actually, I performed on that stage because Arthur and I were active in Sheep Dip for about ten years, performing and doing things behind the scenes. Sheep Dip has played in various locales—the old Flamingo, Bally's, and the showroom at the Nugget. Their home is now the showroom at the Nugget, but when we were active with Sheep Dip, it was at Bally's and the old Flamingo.

Can you tell me about Hello Hollywood?

It was a spectacle show. One of the scenes had the dancers and the singers, but it was also the San Francisco earthquake. There was also a science-fiction-type scene that had a waterfall in it. It was a wonderful show—lots of fun.

Do you remember any of the sketches you performed in while you were involved in Sheep Dip?

The one that I remember the most is when for some unknown reason the legislature created a new county called Bullfrog around Yucca Mountain. They had a skit where Barbara Vucanovich's hair turned green. She was always such a good sport about things like that.

There was one scene... I don't remember the background of it except it had to do with Supreme Court judges. There was an unknown judge who received the Shaft Award and came onstage with a brown paper bag over his face. It was mostly just poking fun at some of the things that were being done. There was some very, very good political satire. There was one skit dealing with brothels, and I played the madam who made so much money that she retired and opened up a library.

The last one I did was in 1996, and they talked me into doing a single based on

“Adelaide’s Lament” from *Guys and Dolls* about losing my run for mayor. It was a beautifully done bit of satire. I don’t remember all the lyrics now. When I ran for mayor... I won’t tell you the name of the gentleman who came into my office, because I don’t like to point fingers. He said to me that they (I don’t know who “they” were)... the downtown boys were going to elect Jeff as mayor, so why didn’t I just withdraw and not bother to run.

I sort of looked at him and I said, “There are three things that happen when you’re in a campaign: you can win, you can lose, but you never walk away.” The best thing that ever happened was I lost, because that meant that I didn’t have to resign from my presidential appointment. I had ten fascinating years both as vice chair and then chair of the commission. As a result, the State Department sent me overseas to lecture on library administration. It was a fascinating ten years. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.

I want to go back to when you started at the library.

It was November 11 of 1974. That was the one year in which they had decided that Armistice Day would be celebrated for a long weekend. That only lasted for one year—they went back to Armistice Day being on the eleventh.

I was working at the State Library at the time and I had told the state librarian, the late Joseph Anderson, that if I ever had the opportunity to work for the Washoe County Library, I would take the job. Joe said, “Fine with me.” Joe knew that I was going to get the job before I did.

I had stayed at the State Library while other professional staff went to a conference down in Tonopah. Mr. Andrews had stated that he would make the announcement in

Tonopah. I had taken the test and I had come out number one on the list, but the reason he didn’t make the announcement was because he hadn’t interviewed me. Joe came back from the meeting (that was on a Monday) and said, “Mr. Andrews wants to meet with you tomorrow morning.”

So, on Tuesday I went to meet with Mr. Andrews and we talked for three hours. I finally looked at him and I said, “Mr. Andrews, are you or are you not offering me this job?”

He said, “Well, I thought you knew, Mrs. Gould.”

I said, “Well, how would I know? You haven’t said anything.”

So I went to work at the Washoe County Library. At that time, the position was just a Librarian IV and it was second-in-command. We changed the title to Public Services librarian because Mr. Andrews didn’t want to have an associate director. As he was getting ready to retire and he was winding down, he said to me, “Your job, Mrs. Gould, is to turn this into a system.” In those days each branch was doing their own thing. The Sparks branch was doing their own thing in many ways. We had two rooms in the elementary school up at Incline that served as a branch and they were doing their own thing.

It was in 1978 we got the Stead building. At that time, it was the Truckee Meadows Community College. Back then, before it was called the Western Nevada Community College, they had a building out in Stead but they didn’t have a library. The Stead Branch became the library for the community college literally on a handshake. As I said, that was then and this is now. We had the Stead Branch without having to pay anything. I think it was a dollar a year or something ridiculous. Until we got the new facility at the North Hills Shopping Center in the North Valleys,

that was our branch. Oh, god, it was a terrible building.

Do you remember where the building was located out in Stead?

Oh, yes. It was on Mount Charleston. It was right next to the Job Corps Building. It was on the old Stead Air Force base. I have to tell you, you sweltered in the summer and you froze in the winter. We had the students from the community college, and we had to deal with the kids from Job Corps. This was in the early days of Job Corps when they were also finding their way. The funniest thing I remember is I was out there on a branch visit and going over some of the problems that they were having with the facility. When I looked out of the window... my county car was an old Volare Plymouth station wagon—the biggest piece of crap that I’ve ever driven. There were these six huge boys from the Job Corps and they had picked up my car and they were walking away with it. To this day, I don’t remember saying this, but the staff told me that I ran out of the library and said to them, “Put down my car!” which they did. They were doing it as a joke. We did develop into a good working relationship with the Job Corps. Now we’re at the North Hills Branch.

When I went to work in 1974, things were very different with the county back in those days. At the downtown building there were no windows in the upstairs offices. Mr. Andrews’ office was in the birdcage. My office was at the other end with no windows. It was really grim.

We did make some changes when they passed the statewide bond, and it was Washoe County that put it over the edge. Las Vegas took most of the money, though, and we got a pittance. We used that to do some changes at Reno Central. We put windows in all the

offices, which made a tremendous difference. When you work in an area without windows, it’s like being in a tomb. It really is not a good working situation. Once we got windows put in those upstairs offices, everything changed.

We used to have Bookmobiles, and I did away with the Bookmobiles. We had contracts with Churchill County, Storey County, Pershing County, and Lyon County. We couldn’t afford to keep the Bookmobiles on the road. They were old. The contracts that had been set-up were paying us six thousand dollars a year. That didn’t cover the cost of maintenance of the Bookmobiles. We did away with the Bookmobiles and, in turn, we worked with the NLA (Nevada Library Association) to get the rural Bookmobiles, which are funded by the state. They picked up the slack.

One of the things I remember about the Bookmobiles—I would go out occasionally on a Bookmobile run—is we serviced the brothels in Lyon County. We stopped at the Moonlite, the Starlight, and the Kit Kat. I have to tell you that the girls were fascinating. They read the most eclectic range—everything under the sun. Some of the girls were actually doing that to work their way through college, and they were fascinating to talk to. A lot of the girls from the Mustang used the Sparks Branch or the Downtown Branch, and I got to know them. They were really charming and delightful. Many of them very well educated and very well read.

How often would the Bookmobiles stop at one location?

Some locations it was once a month. In other locations it was every two weeks.

What branches were open when you first started?

When I first started, we had Downtown, Incline, and Sparks. After I came to work for Mr. Andrews, we created the Stead Branch, and then we built a new branch up at Incline. That opened in 1978 or 1979. To this day, the idea that eventually we would put a second story on that building... of course that never happened.

We had some interesting problems with that building. I think the biggest problem was that, for whatever reason, none of the staff had public desks... I had worked a public desk for many years before I came to work for Washoe County, and I used to work the reference desk as part of my job.... That building had a flat roof. We had these huge support beams that were starting to crack and that had to be banded. There was no storage space in the branch. Running that branch was not easy. Now we have the new branch, thanks to the tax override and to the bond issue that was passed in 2000.

While I was with the Washoe County Library System, we did the first renovation at the Sparks Branch. We turned the area where we had the Bookmobiles into office space and put in the windows at Downtown. We redid the Children's Room at Sparks. Sparks has since undergone other major renovations.

When I became librarian in 1994, we were faced with some real problems. That is when the library board and I came up with the idea of the Citizens' Blue Ribbon Committee. That is being replicated now with the Citizens' Committee that is looking again at the future of the library system. They did a wonderful job. It took them seventeen months of really hard work and they came back with a series of recommendations that needed to be implemented within the first five years.

It was my idea to put branches in rental space. The first one was, I believe, Sierra View. At that time, Old Town Mall wasn't called Reno Town Mall, and it was a dying mall.

I negotiated a contract that gave us three years of no rent and no common-area costs—no CAM—because I told them it would rejuvenate the mall, and it did. I don't recall exactly what we were paying. We never had to pay CAM. I remember it was a five-year contract with a clause that we could renew for another three years at the same rate. Our square-footage costs, when we finally started paying rent, were minimal because we brought in a thousand people a day.

Then TMCC rented the whole upstairs and people started using the mall again. Originally, we were upstairs in the old Gray Reid's space. When Marshall's moved out, we moved down to where we are today.

One of the funniest stories is when I wanted the neon sign that said "Washoe County Library." For some reason, people were horrified at the idea of a neon sign at the library, and I never could quite understand why. I thought it was really a great idea. We negotiated a very good contract with Young Electric Sign so that the sign didn't cost us a hell of a lot of money.

When they built the Raley's out in North Hills, I negotiated with them, and again we had a couple of years of no rent followed by very modest rent. Then as people were moving out and they had empty space, we just kept on expanding the branch.

Interestingly enough, I worked with a developer on the land between the shopping center and the elementary school, so we had land dedicated to the Washoe County Library. Now, the county did a land swap, so there is a parcel of land actually a part of the mall. When they did the land swap, they did away with the criteria that said the land could only be used for a library. At the last board meeting, which was a couple of weeks ago, I told the board of library trustees, "That's an asset. If the county ever sells that land, it was supposed to be used for a library."

Maybe nobody can find the original paperwork. It does have a habit of disappearing, but I remember and I have staff that remembers. We have to say to the county, "You have to give us at least some of the price of this land." It comes to the library because it was supposed to be used for a library. Dealing with the county was always interesting, but we did become a library system.

When we ended the Bookmobile run to Gerlach, it turned out that the Washoe County School District was using the Bookmobile as the high school library. In order to be certified under what was then the Northwest Accreditation something or other, high schools had to have a library.

Marge Maples was the school library coordinator and Leona Wright was my coordinator who worked with children and young adults. The three of us came up with the idea of the partnership library, and that's how the partnership libraries started. It started in Gerlach.

I remember when Leona, Marge, and I drove up to Gerlach. We were going to be weeding the school library collection, which was pathetic. When we went to the county and the school board to get this contract done, we brought some of the books from the school library. The most current book they had on transportation had a copyright of 1931. Books dealing with space were from 1940, 1941, or 1945. We had already put the man on the moon, for god's sakes. That was in 1969. Anyhow, that was the first.

We had a committee made up of teachers, librarians, and parents that oversaw the development of what then became several joint-use libraries. Each school's public library had its own contract to meet the specific needs of that school and that neighborhood. When Mendive was built, it was built to actually have a school/public library. We had one at Billingshurst and

we had one at Galena, but those were temporary until we could get branches built. When South Valley's was built, which was after my time, the Galena branch closed.

When Northwest Branch was built, we closed Billingshurst, which made a lot of people very unhappy. That was interesting because I actually got the land for the Northwest Branch and it was not the location the library is in now; it was off Las Brisas. It was donated to us by Sierra Pacific and Wade Development, and people were very excited.

So when we built... a man actually sold us what was basically a warehouse building that was then renovated into the Northwest Branch. We saved a lot of money that way. The man and his wife are wonderful philanthropists, and he totally underwrote the Children's Room. The Children's Room is named for his mother-in-law, who was a children's librarian.

We had a lot of support, and those were built with the tax-override dollars, which is the last thing that I helped get done.

The biggest trouble I had was getting the Duncan-Trainer branch built. That neighborhood wanted a library desperately. They are not that far from Sparks or from downtown, but at that time there was no bus route. There was no way for anyone to walk to a branch without having to cross major streets, and it was a long walk no matter how you looked at it.

Originally, we went into Trainer, and it was a battle royal. I never had a problem with Galena, with Billingshurst, with Gerlach, or with Mendive. I had a battle royal to get Duncan-Trainer up and running. I'm not going to go into the where and the why for it, but part of it is very obvious. It was quite interesting.

The community wanted that branch so badly. We did get into Trainer, and we were in

Trainer for several years, but the community wanted more. They went with me to the city and they managed to hold on for two years to CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] money. It was about a quarter of a million. The teachers at Glen Duncan voted to use their share of the interest earnings from the school bond to match the CDBG. That is how we got the community branch between Trainer and Glen Duncan. It is a well-used branch.

There are some problems in that community, I understand now, with vandalism. For the first few years, though, the community just... but communities change. Gangs come in. Glen Duncan gets out around two in the afternoon and you have a parade of kids and parents going the 125 feet from the school to that community branch. It is well used.

Those are things that... I never did it by myself. I was lucky in that I had a fantastic board of library trustees and a fabulous staff. The strength of a library in a community is not so much the building or the collection, but the people. Even to this day you have a dedicated staff of people who go way above and beyond to serve the public. Yes, I was lucky. I guess I have to say I was a pretty good director; I had wonderful staff that worked with me, and a lot of support in the community.

The Washoe County Library in its glory days... I can say the glory days were when I was the director and when Nancy Cummings was the director. The public loved their library system. It's a good system.

We pioneered a lot of things. We were the first public library to really make use of technology. I remember sitting down with Joy Ball, who was then the Public Services librarian up at Getchell. She and I came up with the idea of the joint computer system, which at that time was strictly a circulation

system. We had a contract with the university. Negotiating that contract was interesting. I didn't have any problem with the county, but I sure as hell had a lot of problems with the university system. They like to talk about town and gown, but back then it was just so much hot air as far as I'm concerned.

However, we pulled off the contract. We received the money through federal funding and the university library had the space. We shared staff support. This was actually before I became the library director. We signed that contract in 1976 with what was then the only company that had a turnkey library computer program. The company was called CLSI.

We took two years to input data and to train staff, and then we went online. At five o'clock in the morning I went up to the university library to bring the system up. Getchell Library talks. The building talks, and on a winter morning at 5:00 a.m., it is creepy as hell.

We shared the system, and then we split in 1986. The database was getting big. I had been able to work out a very good contract. Sometimes you do things without knowing that you're doing the right thing. When we input the data, just for the circulation and patron system, we input... it was just author and title, but for some unknown reason I put in the LCCN number and the ISBN number. Don't ask me why. Technology moves very quickly, and because I had put in those two numbers, we were able to match our system with what was known as the MACR Record from the Library of Congress and build the first online public catalogue, which was at Washoe County. It took a lot to maintain that, so we turned the database over to the State Library. The State Library then used it to bring online all of the rural county libraries.

When the university librarian retired, the new university librarian (who is now the

Vice President for Libraries), decided to drop the program with us, which is why we split. Washoe County Library is the oldest public library in the state of Nevada and to this day still has one of the most complete historic collections of what we call last copy. I don't know if we are today, but at the time I retired, we were the major provider of interlibrary loan to the rural counties and to Clark County.

We worked out a deal with the university library where we would send one of our staff up to the library with all the paperwork to pull the books for interlibrary loans, so the University Library staff wouldn't have to handle that. We also had a collection service so that if somebody borrowed a university book and didn't return it, the county had a collections officer that we used, and we would send them out to get the damn book. I don't know if they do it today or not.

Anyhow, the university said they had lost too many books, which wasn't true. They just wanted to split the sheets and have nothing, so they did away with the whole interlibrary loan system. So now our patrons, if they want to borrow materials from the university library, can do it two ways: They can buy a university library card.... To this day UNR is the only university library in the state that does not have reciprocity with public libraries.

Now if we have interlibrary loan, we mail it up to the university. Their staff has to pick the books up and do all the paperwork, and our patrons have to pay a five-dollar fee. It's just ridiculous, because the cost in staff time is what hurts the university library. Now they are the Knowledge Center, and I have no idea what goes on. I don't even know if we ever go to them for interlibrary loan.

We pioneered the first fax network for document delivery. I used to get calls from the manager's office for information. I would say, "We'll fax it up to you."

They would say, "Well, we don't have a fax machine."

My response was, "Why not?" The early fax machines were hysterical, but the new ones are fabulous. I have a fax machine in my office. It is part of my printer. It is a printer, fax machine, and scanner.

So Washoe County Library was responsible for developing the first online catalogue and giving the database to the state to maintain. We could do that because we used federal money to build it, and the State Library is the one that handles the federal dollars that then go out to the libraries. We were in the forefront of doing a lot of stuff with technology and training staff.

My biggest battle with the county... keyboarding is very different from using a typewriter. They kept on insisting that our library assistants had to take a typing test. I would say, "No, no, no. You have to have them do something on a computer."

When we split from the university, we were getting ready to upgrade to a new system because CLSI could no longer give us what we needed. I went to the county. They needed to upgrade a lot of their computer equipment. I had the federal dollars, so we moved everything to the county. The county manages our computers for us, but the original computers that the county bought when they upgraded were paid for by the library system.

Nobody remembers that. It's not written down anywhere. God knows how long the county is keeping anything anyhow. I was looking up some information on former staff. They don't even have those records anymore. I think they keep records for five years. It's insane. We used to keep records... I know we have library minutes going back to the very beginning, because the law creating public libraries was passed in 1903. Washoe County's

first library, which was where the downtown Post Office is today, was a Carnegie building that opened in 1904 as the Reno Public Library.

We have twelve branches now. I opened Sierra View, Incline, North Valleys, Gerlach, Galena, Billingshurst, and Duncan-Trainer. We talked the county in letting us do a tax override in 1994. The county said, "Sure, go ahead. We're not going to fight you. We're not going to support you. We're just going to ignore you, because it won't pass." It was the only tax override in the state that passed in 1994.

There was a gentleman in finance who said, "You have all of these tax dollars coming in, so we can cut back on your general fund."

My answer was, "You had better go back and look at the language of the ballot question."

He did, and he came back and said, "How did we ever let this get by us?"

I said to him, "Because, you son of a bitch, you underestimated us," and I hung up.

They did underestimate us. The Friends created a PAC [Political Action Committee], did all the paperwork, and used personal dollars. Whatever money the Friends had can only be used for the library, so they did this all on their own personal money and own personal time. We ran the campaign on a little under twenty thousand dollars and, as I said, it passed.

The library, from my point of view and from the point of view of many people in this community, is really the heart and the soul of a community. We serve literally from the womb to the tomb.

We also opened the Senior Center Branch. I had a battle royal when they built the Senior Center. I really pushed... the director of the Senior Center has since retired and left the community. She's gone back east. She fought

with me. She thought the idea of having a Senior Center Branch was fantastic, and it's a highly used branch.

We live in a society now that is what I call on information overload. There is a real lack of what I call information literacy. The Internet is really... permanent employment for librarians because there is so much on the Internet that is bad. People come to the library for help in finding information on the Internet. We are one of the few resources that people have for free use of computers. With unemployment where it is, they use our computers to help them job-searches and do résumés. We have an excellent collection of foundation information for people who are writing grants because we have a small Regional Foundation Center library.

People flock to the library for the children's programming. The Friends totally underwrite the cost of programming for the library system, so no tax dollars are used for programming in the library system. People flock to the library for not only the family programs, but adult programs as well.

We teach people how to use computers. We work with AARP during tax season so people can come to the library to get help with their taxes. We are what we call a Community Commons. You can come to the library to find information on all kinds of social services. We keep files so if people want to know whether there is a stamp club or how they can get in touch with an entity.... All those things are what you find at the public library.

We have licenses for massive information databases. People can come to the library and know that when they go online to one of our databases that we have links to, it is good information.

Joan Kerschner negotiated... you don't think of librarians.... Once you move into library management, you are no longer a

librarian per se. You really are a CEO. I always sell myself as a CEO because I had to know about municipal finance and taxes, I had to be knowledgeable in personnel and human resource issues, and I had to learn how to negotiate contracts.

I was lucky in that I grew up in the family business, so I learned a lot from my father. It came in very handy. Today I probably couldn't work a public desk. Back then one of the things I mandated is that branch managers had to spend half of their time working a public desk, interacting directly with the patrons that use that library so they would have a feel of the community.

I also pushed for my management staff and the paraprofessionals, if they so wished... I didn't mandate it for the paraprofessionals, but I mandated it for the branch managers that they join a service club. They did because that not only raises the visibility of the library, but it also lets the library make better known the services they have.

I gave them staff time to attend the luncheons or meetings. I couldn't pay their fees, but I gave them the time because I felt it was important that they understand the community they serve. I think that is one of the reasons that the public so supports the library system, because we're very open to community needs.

The Downtown Library was the *de facto* day shelter for the homeless for many years. We didn't get a hell of a lot of help from the police, I'll tell you that. We sat down with the ACLU and worked out a list of do's and don'ts for the homeless who use the library. We also worked with the Salvation Army and with the Gospel Mission, so that when the aroma became too difficult, we politely said to them, "This is where you need to go. You can get a shower, get your clothes washed, and clean up. Then you're more than welcome to come back

to the library." We had a list that was approved by the ACLU so we wouldn't get into trouble.

We did have some serious problems with some of our homeless who had alcohol or mental illness problems. I did have a couple of interesting run-ins with no-longer police chiefs. For years I asked the county for security in the building. I remember telling him, "One of these days, someone is going to get hurt." What I didn't bargain for was the person who got hurt was me. I was mugged by one of the library homeless in the alley behind the library. I was knocked down and dragged until I could get my purse off my shoulder. That is the reason today I have two new knees and walk with a cane.

After that, we had security in the library. We also set up systems... for instance, if staff were working at night, I gave them the time to go and move their car to the City Hall parking lot, because after five o'clock we could use it. Staff always left together at night, and if someone had to leave after dark, they were always escorted finally by the security person if they were by themselves.

We still have a very serious homeless problem in this community. We are working with the shelter. As I understand, we do provide materials in the family shelter and I think also in the men's shelter. We still have a lot of homeless. No one ever told me when I became first the Public Services librarian and eventually the longest-acting director in the world.... When Mr. Andrews retired, I became acting director and then the library board decided to give me a formal title. Mr. Verostik came, and I became the associate director.

Mr. Verostik came and he had been there for a little less than a year when he had that terrible accident, so I was the acting director again. When he was released to come back to work, the board really treated him very

well, but he never could do the job. When the accident occurred, he hit the rock right here [points to head], and basically he lost all cognitive ability. He was a very nice and very sweet man.

I was running the library system again, even though he was still the director, because he couldn't do the job. Finally the board said, "Enough is enough." I was the acting director... we had a board meeting in July, and I told the board what they needed to do in order to do a search for a new director. I felt we needed to do a national search. They were going to go into a personnel session, which is a closed session, so I went home.

My husband and I were sitting in what they call a great room (now we call it a family room). John Sinky, who was the chair of the board, came to the house. He came in and we offered him a glass of wine. Art and I were having wine, cheese, and crackers before we had dinner. John said to me, "Are you going to ask me why I'm here?"

I said, "No." [laughs]

Anyhow, he said, "I'm here to offer you the job. The board unanimously decided you have been doing it for so long, you might as well officially become the director."

I said, "Thank you. I will accept it." This was in 1984. I had been acting on and off since 1979.

How long did you serve?

Ten years officially. Unofficially... [laughter]

Unofficially, much longer than that.

Yes. When I went to work for Mr. Andrews, he literally turned the library system over to me and said, "That's it." He was getting ready to retire. In his last five years, he signed papers

that I gave him, but basically I was responsible for everything. I would bring everything to Mr. Andrews. He would officially approve it. I would go with him to the library board meetings. I would bounce a lot of my ideas off him, but basically I was running the library system. He didn't like to be out in the public, so I was the one who was always going to public meetings and representing the library system. There were a hell of a lot of people in town who thought I was the library director before I became the library director.

I was looking at the Washoe County Library System website and read a couple of mission statements and goals. One of them was "The library is a cultural center offering lifelong learning and enrichment opportunities through the access of ideas, information, and the arts." How do libraries fill the role as a cultural center?

Well, in many ways. The programs that we do with schools, with the children, and the programs that the libraries and the Friends underwrite... we bring in music, theater, storytelling, and book talks. If exposing people to music and the arts makes us a cultural center, then I agree we are a cultural center.

Many years ago... nothing ever came of this because I had retired by the time Steve High came to the Nevada Museum of Art, but I had kept on saying, "We would be delighted to catalogue and have in our catalogue all of the books in the museum's art collection." I don't know whether that ever happened. It didn't happen on my watch, but it should have.

Interestingly enough, when I was on the U.S. National Commission of Libraries and Information Science (this has nothing to do with Washoe County, but it does have something to do with the Nevada Museum

of Art), Jeanne Simon, the wife of the late Senator Paul Simon, was the chair and I was her vice chair.... When she became ill, I was the acting chair, and after she died I became the chair. As I said, my career has been as acting....

Back in 1996, the Library Services and Construction Act was up for reauthorization, as was the Museum Services Act. They were both facing the possibility of not being reauthorized. Jeanne Simon and I came up with the idea of the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which handles the money from museums and the Library Services and Technology Act.

One of the things IMLS does is they give out national awards. I went to Steve High and said, "I would very much like to nominate this museum for the first Museum Services Award." They gave out three awards for museums and three awards for libraries every year, and we were one of the first three. I wrote the letter and I also served on the first IMLS Joint Museum and Library Board. Jeanne was the co-chair and then I was still Jeanne's vice chair. If she wasn't around, I was around.

I had to recuse myself when they discussed the Nevada Museum of Art. It won one of the first three awards. Peter Poole, who was the chair of the NMA at the time, told me that that kick-started the capital campaign, which has resulted in this magnificent museum. I'm very proud of that. I did nothing except write a letter of recommendation, but somebody had to write that letter of recommendation. I did, and it kick-started their 26-million-dollar capital campaign.

Are there specific library programs that were put on during your time that stand out for you?

I think the children's programs, which are the ongoing programs—the storytelling and the toddler programs. There is a great deal of

research that says children who are exposed to books and to being read to—have an auditory experience—have the least difficulty in learning how to read. So our children's programs are the most important.

Now, I didn't do the programs. We had Judy Vaughn at Sparks who is fabulous. We had Leona Wright at Reno Central who is a fantastic storyteller. Leona would go out to all the branches to do storytelling.

Before I became director, my background basically was as a children's librarian. I had some administrative experience with a Federal Demonstration Project on the Osage Indian Reservation before I met my husband and we moved to Los Angeles. I was a children's librarian and storyteller for the New York Public Library.

One of the things that I still think back on with such pleasure is I was one of the storytellers on Saturday mornings in the summer at the Hans Christian Andersen statue in Central Park. There I would be with my brown bag that said "Read Between the Lions," and my little camp stool, which I didn't use because I would sit next to the duckling telling stories.

In Los Angeles I was what we call a senior children's librarian. I was responsible for training children's librarians and doing children's programming for all of the branches in the East San Fernando Valley. I was also one of the book selectors for children's books for the entire Los Angeles Public Library System.

My background really was children's literature. When I came to Nevada, I had had some administrative experience, but not a hell of a lot. I had a lot of experience as a reference librarian for children, and if you can figure out what it is a kid wants, believe me, you can do adult reference work.

Until I became the library director, I would say probably between 40 and 50

percent of my time as the associate director, in addition to chairing the Book Selection Committee for the library system was spent working the reference desk downtown, which was interesting. We had some interesting people. We still do.

Can you tell me about the gallery spaces in the various branches?

The branches now manage their own library space, and there are lots of artists in this community. We do have a contract for Reno Central, which I think it's up this year, with Sierra Arts. They hang the collection there. We reach out to the arts community, like the Artist's Cooperative. Back when I was the library director, we had a calendar, and people came and we let them have little opening receptions up on the balcony.

When we built new branches, we were adamant about having gallery space because a lot of people use the library. They may not be people who necessarily think about going to the museum or going to the Artist's Cooperative. They will come to the library, though, and they are exposed to work of local artists. That is a very important component of our public service.

Did we have to fight to get gallery space? Oh, you had better believe we had to fight for that. It is necessary, though. It is an outlet for local artists that they otherwise might not be able to show what they are capable of doing. I'm not sure where the contract is now with Sierra Arts or if we're able to even continue it.

When we opened the gallery down at South Valleys, for a number of years it was underwritten by the John Ben Snow Trust. I don't know whether they're still doing that or not. I know that they're still supporting the library in some ways. At this point, basically, each branch is managing its own gallery.

Does each branch have a gallery space?

In the public community room at Sparks, we hang paintings. We have the gallery on the upper level at Reno Central. We have a separate gallery at South Valleys. We have a gallery in the community room at Incline. I know that we hang things. I think there is a gallery in one of the rooms at the North Valleys branch. The Northwest Branch has a gallery area where you can go into the meeting rooms, and we have Secondhand Prose [Bookstore].

As I said, for a number of years now, the Friends underwrite all the programming. We've brought in musicians. We've brought in artists. We've brought in professional storytellers. Libraries, going back to Annie Carroll Moore at the turn of the century, really brought about the renaissance of storytelling. The New York Public Library was a leader in that. I was trained in storytelling by Augusta Baker, who was one of the greats at the New York Public Library.

This goes back to when I was in New York. We had some interns who were librarians from Japan. In 1984, my husband and I went to Japan for a month. We went with my friend Yoshi Hendricks, who was one of the librarians at the university and has, sadly, since passed away. Yoshi was just a delight. She and I were very close friends. We had been planning to go to Japan, and Yoshi said, "Well, I'm going back to Japan for a month to help my dad." Her mother had passed away and she was helping her dad clean out the house.

So Arthur and I went to Japan with Yoshi, and we stayed at International House, which is a hotel for academics. My husband was a professor at the university, so we were able to stay there. It also had a wonderful research library, so I stopped in to chitchat with the librarian, whose name I do not recall. I'm

smiling because she remembered my name from the summer after my husband and I were married. I had gone back to work for the New York Public Library for a few months, and I was a storyteller at their annual Storytelling Festival. She remembered me from storytelling, which just blew my mind because by then my husband and I had been married for about twenty-four years. She was a young library intern from Japan at the New York Public Library back in 1960 when I was one of the storytellers. They always did this annual Storytelling Festival. I've never forgotten that. She was the librarian in the research library at International House. It's a funny bit.

Are there certain artists or exhibits at the libraries that stand out for you?

One of the exhibits that I remember was the Reno Rodeo posters, and I got a lot of flak from animal lovers. They demanded that I take the exhibit down, and I said to them, "You know, the rodeo is very important to this community. I am not going to take these posters down."

They complained to the library board, and the library board said, "We stand with Mrs. Gould. We have a good working relationship with the rodeo and we will continue it."

We don't really vet the exhibits. When I was the library director, the only thing I said was no frontal nudity. I said, "I don't think that's appropriate for a library. If we had a separate gallery that had controlled entrance, that would be one thing. Our galleries are in a public area, though, so whatever we hang has to be family-friendly." I never really had any problems.

Do you remember programming that was tied in with exhibits at the different galleries?

No, beyond the fact that we always let the artists have a little reception for the opening.

What is the interaction between more traditional services of a library and these specialized cultural exhibits or programming?

It's a symbiotic relationship. It's about the only way I can describe it. I know that we plan our programs around certain holidays, so we have Christmas and Hanukkah programs. I don't know how they plan the exhibits now. We do have a staff person who is responsible for programming. The programs that are funded by the Friends actually go from branch to branch, so they are at every branch in addition to the story hours or film programs that the library might put on.

We do put on movies in the library because there are a lot of people today who cannot afford to take their kids to the movies. I can't afford to go the movies at \$6.50, and that is for a senior in the afternoon.

You mentioned that you had some problems integrating gallery spaces into the libraries.

The problem lay not with the library staff, but with the planning of the branches. I had to talk the county into the validity of why we should have galleries.

They felt like it wasn't worth the extra expense?

Well, there wasn't really any expense beyond staff time. Again, it is reaching out into your community and providing a community service to what is a very important component of our community. We have a vibrant arts community now, and this gives them another outlet. When they remodeled City Hall and they put in the City Hall gallery, then I never had any problem. After that, there was no problem.

Can you tell me about storytelling for Artown?

Yes. For several years, we actually were out in the park with Artown and we did storytelling. We had our own little tent and we did storytelling. Much of that happened after I left, though they did ask me to come back if I would consider doing some storytelling. I did do a little storytelling a couple of summers during Artown. I have no idea what we do with Artown now, except I think they use the library for some of the venues.

You mentioned that for a time the Jazz Festival was involved with the libraries.

Yes, years ago. Now it's all up at the university, I believe, but the auditorium and downtown library actually hosted some of the jazz concerts.

How did that come about?

They asked us and we said yes.

Were any fees involved?

Not then. The fees came about later. I just remember that the buses would pull out and the kids would pile out with all their instruments.

We did for a period of time have noon concerts in the garden at the downtown library, which was really wonderful. People would come with their brown-bag lunch and listen to music. We let them have their brown-bag lunch in the library. God forbid we should let people eat in the library.

There were funny things that happened. For instance, we had a problem with aphids one year. We had those wonderful, comfortable upholstered chairs in the garden level. Unfortunately, the chairs acquired lice

thanks to some of our interesting patrons. We had to get rid of all the comfortable chairs and put in the plastic chairs.

When we opened up Sierra View, we moved the main children's collection to Sierra View. When we did that, we kept a small collection downtown, but the big collection and the major programming went to Sierra View. I did that for safety reasons because we did have some serious problems with the homeless. I did have to handle some rather interesting problems with some of our homeless people in the stacks. I was concerned about the safety of children.

We rearranged the downtown library and we put periodicals in what was in the Children's Room and moved the Children's Room to Sierra View. Parents would say to me, "But I came here as a child."

I would say, "We've done it and this is the reason."

They would look at me and they would say, "Okay."

I would say, "Besides, you have much better parking down at the Sierra View Branch." Parking became a very serious problem. As you know, things were built up around the library, and parking.... It is amazing that we still get between eight hundred and a thousand people a day into downtown. God knows where they park.

What sort of outreach does the library system engage in to involve people?

We reach out to the arts groups. We do work with Sierra Arts, which used to be the Sierra Arts Foundation. Now it's just Sierra Arts. There was a time when we worked well with the university.

The music teachers for many years held their recitals in the auditorium downtown because we had this wonderful grand piano

that was given to us by Leo Manning. He and his wife were very active in music groups and taught piano, and they donated the grand piano. I don't even know where the grand piano is now. To this day I think recitals, not only piano but voice recitals, are held in the auditorium. For a long time, the only venue for recitals was the downtown library. The acoustics in the auditorium are really quite good.

What community groups used the auditorium?

All kinds of groups. Even political groups were allowed to use the library, as long as they didn't do fundraising and it was open to the public. Civic groups, service clubs, the music teachers, and arts groups—they all used the library auditorium. It was open and it was free.

We worked a deal with the county when the county started demanding that we have insurance. The library does have liability insurance with the county, so if a group is under a certain number of people, they don't have to worry about insurance. Otherwise, they have to pay a small premium to be carried on the umbrella liability insurance with the county. For instance, knitting groups meet in libraries. There's a quilting group that uses South Valleys. We let groups who need a place to meet on a monthly basis program, or we used to. Again, this is when I was the library director. Once I stepped down, I told my predecessor, "You have my phone number. If you need me, call." Arnie was the same way. I said "If you need me, call." I stay out of the management of the library system, except showing up at board meetings on occasion to give them some historic background.

The library does have a good archive. In fact, I ought to go look at the archives someday just out of curiosity. One of the things that most people don't realize is that

the Washoe County Library System was very much involved with Governor Bryan's Women's Conference that was held in 1989. I chaired that conference. I really didn't want to, but you do not say no to Governor Bryan. As a result, my committee met in my office and a lot of my staff gave personal time to be involved in the planning and in putting on the conference. The library was sort of the linchpin for that conference, which was very successful.

Has the participation of the library in the different programs and activities changed over the years?

It's grown. In hard times it really has grown because it is a place where parents can bring their children to see a movie, to see a program, to go to Story Hour, or to borrow books because they can't afford to buy them. People can do a job-search, work on their résumé, and do research on our computers, which are free of charge. We also are a community resource because we keep files on all kinds of resources in the community. People come to us and say, "Where can I go for this type of service?" We have the information—we call it a Community Commons.

How does the attendance of exhibits in the gallery spaces and the culturally oriented programming and events compare to attendance of the libraries?

They are always very well attended. There are space limits, so if we have a program in the auditorium, it is limited to 106 seats. Sometimes, if you don't tell the Fire Department, we have a few more than that. I can say our programs, back when I was there and I'm pretty sure today, are probably close to standing room only.

What kind of support have art-, music-, and culturally-oriented activities received from the community?

Some people ask if they can do a program. Others we reach out to. Now that we have a programming person, I suspect it is a combination of people coming to us and our reaching out to groups. Back when I was the library director, it was a combination. Some people came and some people we reached out to.

I remember for many years we had Wednesday afternoon travel films in the library, back in the days when we had film. The attendance usually ranged anywhere from fifty to eighty people in the auditorium—mostly retirees and homeless. They loved the travel films. We had quite a collection of them.

What impact have the exhibits and the programming had on the community?

Well, it is hard to say. The impact must be very important and very good because the programming attendance grows and the demand grows. People see the library as a safe place where they can come with their children. They see it as a place where they can come and be exposed to things that they can't afford to pay for. We have in this community, even before the recession, a large population of the working poor that was totally invisible except to those of us in the library. Parents would come with their children because they couldn't afford... they live from paycheck to paycheck, but they would come for the children's programming.

We discovered at one point that a lot of children were being dropped off at the library and sometimes the parents wouldn't show up to pick them up. We had to create a policy about unattended children in the library and that

under a certain age they couldn't be unattended. That caused quite a bit of a hullabaloo.

There were a number of times I set my hours so that I would work until nine o'clock at night so I could see what was going on in the library. I would discover there would be a kid and no parent. I would stay with the security officer and send the rest of the staff home until a parent showed up. Sometimes it would be an hour after closing. We closed at nine o'clock at night. I would tell the parent, "Look, if this happens again, I will turn your child over to Child Protective Services."

"Why, you can't do that."

I said, "Oh, yes, I can. If you think I'm going to leave a child sitting out in front of a library after it's closed in the dark, you have another thought coming. *You're the parent.*" I had a few of those situations, so we now have an unattended children's policy. It is for the protection of the child, especially today.

You were appointed to the U.S. National Commission of Libraries and Information Science. How did that come about?

Well, it was strange. The Commission was created in 1970, and back then I was very active in the American Library Association. I served on their Legislative Committee, so I used to go to Washington D.C. and lobby for the American Library Association. I got to be fairly friendly with Senator Laxalt. At one of my meetings, I was talking about the Commission, and he ended up nominating me. Somehow it just kept on going on—it was Senator Laxalt, then it was Senator Bryan, then it was Congresswoman Vucanovich, and then it was Senator Reid. It got to the point that each year I would say, "Well, if you want to do it again, I would be very happy."

I've always been very politically inclined. I have been criticized for being so active

politically in support of library. I have told people when I taught library administration overseas that you have to understand the source of your funding and contacts with the people who control the funding, which means you have to be politically knowledgeable. In the years when I was working, I never worked on a campaign. I couldn't. If I worked on one campaign and the opponent got elected, that was not good. After I retired, it was a whole different story. It was in 1993 and I had worked on Clinton's campaign. Virginia Cain called me and said, "You need to call the governor because Clinton is looking for women in Nevada to be appointed."

Well, I personally knew Governor Miller. I can't remember whether I wrote him a letter or I called him, but I said, "Going back to Senator Laxalt, my name has been put up for nomination to the National Commission going on twenty years."

As far as I can figure out, Clinton talked to Miller, and Miller evidently said, "Well, there's this librarian...."

The next thing I knew, I got a call from the White House Office of Personnel. I can't think of the name of the man who called me. Barbara Becht, who was my administrative assistant, came into my office. She handled calls that didn't come into my personal line. My personal line was in the phone book—I had an open-office policy. Someone from the public could call me directly if they wanted to, and, believe me, they did. I would say 80 percent of the time they were happy about something and 20 percent of the time they were furious.

To anyone who called me, I would say, "Fine. I'm going to ask you to put it in writing because I will not act on something dealing with my staff unless I have it in writing." I would say 99 percent of the time they wouldn't put it in writing. They just wanted to vent. I

did say to them, "I will talk to the staff person involved and get their side of the story." Sometimes I would have to say to the staff person, unless it was something horrendous, "I would suggest you think twice before you say something." I don't recall ever having anything horrendous. The staff, as far as I was concerned, were fabulous and they still are fabulous.

Barbara came into the office and she said to me, "There's a man on the phone who says he's from the White House Office of Personnel."

So I picked up the phone. I said, "Is this call for real?"

He said, "Let me give you my phone number. Call me back."

Anyhow, it was for real. I was appointed by Clinton. I was a commissioner designate, which meant I attended the meetings, I received salary, but I couldn't vote until I was sworn in. I was finally sworn in in July. I was actually sworn in by... I can't remember the name of the county clerk who swore me in in 1993. The formal swearing-in was in Washington in 1994, on one of the hottest days I can remember. We were sworn in in the Indian Treaty Room in the Old Executive Office Building. I served for ten years.

Jeanne Simon had been appointed by Clinton as the chair, and at the very first meeting... Peter Young was the Executive Director of the Commission at the time, and Peter and I had worked together on things when I was lobbying for ALA. Peter introduced me to Jeanne, and we chitchatted. Jeanne said, "I would like you to be my vice chair." I said I would be honored, and we worked together.

It was in 1998 she stepped down and named me acting because her husband was ill. She came back in July of 1999. I remember we were at the ALA conference in July or August

of 1999 and Jeanne was saying, “I’m having real trouble with my eyes.”

She was telling me what it was, and I said, “You know, Jeanne, you really need to see somebody.”

She said, “Well, Paul and I have had this vacation planned. We’re going to the Greek Isles for a month. I’ll see the doctor when I come back.” It turned out to be a malignant blastoma brain tumor. She stepped down, and in September of 1999 I was named acting chair.

Jeanne died in February of 2000 and I was one of the honorary pallbearers at her funeral. The White House actually called me when I was in Missouri to tell me that the president had named me chair. I had just come back to the hotel from the funeral when I got the phone call. She was a lovely lady.

One of the things we used to do in between meetings on Capitol Hill... we couldn’t lobby because we were a presidential committee, so we always couched everything we did in terms of good public policy. It is good public policy, believe me. Between meetings we would very often go back to Paul’s office in the Dirksen Building, and he had this enormous couch. Now, I’m very short and Jeanne was tall. I would be at one end of the couch, and she would be at the other, so our feet would be crossing. We would have a quick power nap before our next meeting.

Before 9/11, when I was with Jeanne and she was still doing things up until 1999, it was really fun because I would go with her. Her car license plate said “Senate 1,” so whenever we went up on the Hill, we were always practically bowed in. I would have lunch with her and Paul in the Senate Dining Room. She was an absolutely fabulous lady, and Paul Simon was just such a wonderful man.

When we pulled together the Institute for Museum and Library Services in 1996, it was

Senator Simon, Senator Kassebaum, Senator Pell, and Senator Jeffers who introduced the bill. Nancy Kassebaum was supporting museums. We were supporting libraries. They were the ones who introduced the bill that created IMLS and moved all library funding out of the Department of Education to IMLS. Now all funding for museums and libraries is funneled through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which is a standalone federal agency. They do all kinds of fabulous things.

Any last thoughts?

If you go onto the Washoe County Library website, there is a history of the library that takes you back to a list of all of the directors, and has a picture of the first library. There are some wonderful stories that I can’t tell you because it involves people who are still alive that may not be terribly flattering, which is why I refuse to give names.

CATHERINE HANCOCK

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Catherine Hancock: I was born in the Washington, D.C. area and lived there until I got married—twenty-eight years—and moved to Nevada because of holy matrimony. My husband was in the East on a job training program and that's where we met. He was employed with the Bureau of Land Management in Reno, and so here we are. My father was in a family optical business in Washington, D.C. My mother taught school for a few years until she was married and then became a homemaker.

Do you remember what schools you were going to while you were growing up in D.C.?

We lived, actually, in Arlington, Virginia (a suburb of Washington), and I went to public elementary schools there: John Marshall and James Madison. We were very patriotic then. Then I moved in the seventh grade to the Academy of the Holy Cross, a

Catholic girl's prep school, and I went to high school there too. I went to Rosemont College, which is a Catholic women's college outside of Philadelphia. After that, because at graduation I had no job skills, really—I was a psychology major—I went to the Washington School for Secretaries. That program was a year, about nine to eleven months.

What kind of classes were you taking?

Oh, the usual: stenography (which nobody uses anymore), typing, business practices, and filing. All these things are out of date now, but they were quite useful. They have been useful.

Was the secretarial school expensive to attend at the time?

I don't think so. Frankly, I don't remember because my parents paid the tuition.

Do you remember being exposed to cultural events or activities during your early life?

Oddly enough, no. I was not exposed to much. We had minimal art and music in elementary school. In high school we did not have any art or music, although we had a very active glee club, which I was in, and that's about it. My family was not particularly interested in the arts.

What did being a part of the Glee Club entail?

Singing. [laughs] We also had a drama department and we put on plays. Because I had a deep voice.... They didn't have boys in the school [I went to], so the girls with the deep voices took the man's parts. I remember playing Robert Browning in a play.

In college, was there a theater department or a music department?

No, but they were very high on the arts. We had the Glee Club and the art group. They put on a Christmas pageant, and it was very interesting. They did live enactments of some famous nativity paintings, which was very interesting. I was only in the Glee Club there for about a year, but then I got lazy because I didn't want to memorize the music. I sang in the college choir after that, which was a lot easier. We didn't perform anywhere. The Glee Club performed for special occasions for basically the student body, but I was not involved in that very long.

Was the church choir something that you enjoyed being a part of?

Yes, and I'll tell you why. We were required to take a class in liturgical music, just one credit, but I got exposed to some absolutely wonderful music which I still like, and that was a blessing.

Was it nuns that were teaching these classes?

Actually, the best professor I ever had was a history professor, and she was a nun. But we had both what they call laypeople and nuns. So the Glee Club was taught by a man, and the choir was taught by a nun.

Specific to the nun, was her background in music?

I don't know. We didn't care then. [laughter] She didn't tell us that she was giving us a class in music appreciation, but that's what it turned out to be, because there's some wonderful liturgical music out there and we got exposed to a lot of it.

Was the music specific to the Catholic Church?

It was mostly classical music, I would say, and liturgical music that went with the various ceremonies like Mass.

Do you remember points earlier in your life, in addition to this liturgical music class, that sparked your interest in music?

I remember when I was fifteen, we had a farm and one night some people came out to just visit there. I didn't know them; they were locals. They had a guitar or two, and I got enthralled with that. I asked my dad if I could take guitar lessons, and he found a teacher just by accident—he was a customer of his at the optical office. So my dad signed me up, neither one of us realizing that Sophocles Papas was one of the finest classical guitar teachers in the world.

He was a protégé of Andrés Segovia, and he was very smart. As a fifteen-year-old, I was not interested in classical music. I wanted to

strum and sing folk songs, so he did that. In fact, he handwrote out [the music]. I still have his music that he handwrote out for me. He got smart later and copyrighted it and sold it.

Then he gradually switched me over to classical guitar, and I stayed with that even after I was married and moved out here to Reno. I gave it up because I just didn't have the time or inclination to practice two hours a day, which you really need to do on a musical instrument. I still enjoy guitar music, though.

How long did you take lessons from him?

I took classes once a week through high school, so that's three years. I stopped in college because I was away at school. Then I started later when I was working and paying for the lessons myself for two or three years.

You mentioned that he'd gone on to copyright this music.

Well, he sold it. He still kept up his teaching. That was the main thing. I think instead of writing out [music] by hand for each student, he published it. That didn't happen while I was taking lessons from him; that was later. NPR actually did a tribute to him after he died. Unfortunately, I tried to get the tape and they sent me the wrong tape, and so I never got it.

Was your family supportive of whatever you were interested in?

Oh, yes. No problem at all. I'd taken, as a kid, the usual piano lessons and bailed out after two or three years. As I say, they were not particularly interested in music, but my brothers are quite musically talented, so there must be something in the genes.

Can you tell me more about why you came to Reno, and what you thought of Reno when you arrived?

Well, as I say, it was holy matrimony that brought me here. Before that, I'd taken a trip...I had never been west of the Mississippi River before. I'd been to Europe, but never this direction. So when Charles and I were negotiating, he suggested that I come out here and take a look. I did, and I met his family in New Mexico, who were lovely to me without quite knowing what was going on exactly. We took a trip through the West, which was very well chaperoned by his mother, and we got engaged at the end of that trip in Las Vegas.

When we came through Reno, we did not stay here overnight, but I was absolutely thrilled with the town—the scenery, the mountains. I like to ski, and all I could see were those beautiful ski hills.

Where did the trip end?

In San Francisco. We covered a lot of territory.

What do you remember of Vegas at the time?

It was way back in the mid fifties, so things were different. There were only a couple of big hotels, and it was really nice down there. It was a totally new experience. I wasn't interested in the gambling, but just the scenery. We saw, as I say, a lot of country between New Mexico and San Francisco.

You said you liked Reno, but what was your impression of Reno during that brief visit?

It was really brief. We drove through town and my husband had to make a business

stop, and then we kept going. We went up to Eureka, California, and across those coastal mountains there. So that was a great trip down the coast.

San Francisco was wonderful. We stayed with his relatives in a suburb there for a couple days. Then I flew home and Charles went back to his job. At that time he was working in Las Vegas. Just before we were married, he was transferred to Reno. We got married back in Arlington, Virginia and whooshed out to Nevada, and I've never looked back. [We've been here] ever since. Well, our first home was in Sparks. We had an apartment there, and then we built this house in 1958 [in southwest Reno].

Were there a lot of other homes around when you moved to this neighborhood?

No. We were the outskirts of the city. There was nothing here. It was just a pasture. We were the first house on this street except for two homes up by Plumb Lane, but there was no street here. A fence ran down the middle of Pine Ridge Drive. I used to take my kids to the fence to pat the horses and look at the pheasants across the way. So it was the outskirts. Now it's basically full.

When would you say the neighborhood got to the point where it is today?

Well, it started, I think, about two years after we built the house in 1957. A local builder bought the property across the street and started building homes one at a time. That was about 1959, maybe. Gradually the neighborhood built up. It didn't take too long. Then they put the street through, which hadn't been there before. So we've seen a lot of change.

Was Jessie Beck the elementary school built yet?

Yes. It was a new school when we first moved here. All of our children went to kindergarten there and then I switched them to the parochial school Our Lady of Snows. Two of them went all the way through [Our Lady of Snows] and three of them went through halfway. Then the youngest three went to public high school and middle school after that.

When you came to Reno, were you surprised by what Reno had? In terms of cultural activities, what was your impression?

I was not too interested. With having five children in seven years, I was busy. Now, the Community Concerts.... I don't have all the information on that, but I think they were in existence then. I didn't start going to them for a few years after that, though.

When did you feel you were really able to start getting involved in cultural events in Reno?

Oh, probably in the early to mid-sixties, possibly. [Being a] PTA mother, room mommy, Bluebird leader, and all that parental stuff didn't leave an awful lot of time.

How did you first get involved?

I think the first thing that I remember was just buying tickets to the community concert that was called Washoe County Community Concerts. It's since changed its name.

What was the nature of Community Concerts?

At the time, it was the only game in town, so they were able to book future stars—mostly classical music and quite a few vocal performances. I remember seeing people like Thomas Hampson. I don't think Beverly Sills played here, but some people that went on

to Metropolitan Opera fame did, so it was wonderful. You could say, "Oh, I saw him or her way back when." They had more soloists who were on their way up. There were vocalists and instrumental music. There were not too many large groups. Some, but not too many.

Where were these performances being held?

At first they were in the State Building, which no longer exists. It was on the site where Pioneer [Center for the Performing Arts] is. The State Building had an auditorium, and the city library was in [there as well]. In 1966, they started building the Pioneer Center, so they tore down the State Building, ergo there was no place for concerts. So the Smith family, and possibly Community Concerts.... I know the Harold Smith family sponsored some really top artists and they used the old Manogue High School gymnasium. It was not an ideal place acoustically or any other way, but that was the only place in town that they could use. That went on for a couple years while Pioneer was being built until it opened in '68.

So Community Concerts then was performing in Pioneer when it opened?

Yes.

Do you remember how expensive the tickets were?

They were very reasonable, I thought. Much cheaper than now, but then the expenses were different too.

Was Community Concerts its own organization or was it an event that different people helped to put on?

It was a nationwide organization, and it was all volunteer. It's always been a volunteer [organization], but they were affiliated nationwide and so you had reciprocal privileges. I remember going down to Carson City to hear the guitarist Christopher Parkening. If you had a ticket here, you could go to a concert in Carson City or California or here—anywhere. It was nice.

Do you know if the national organization was assisting with booking?

I don't know, but I'm sure they were. They probably had a nationwide pool of artists, and so the local people would pick whom they wanted and who was available.

How many performances did they put on during the year?

I think they've always done about five. They are having very hard times now and may go out of business this year. They kept the five, and I always felt that it was probably too many, given the competition from all these other art groups. They were the only game in town at first. I think [fewer shows] would have helped them financially and helped people that just felt overwhelmed and didn't want to go to all that stuff.

After we got the Opera, the Philharmonic, and the Chamber Orchestra, it was very difficult for them to compete for five concerts. They also changed their artists a lot. It's more contemporary with some folk music and things like that. They're having tough times because, unfortunately, they have not been able to attract much new blood. They're down to three volunteers on their board and they have to do everything. I'm not able to help much. I don't feel like I'm qualified to help in that respect. I'll be sorry to see them go out of business, but I'm afraid it's going to happen.

Before this competition came in, how well attended were the performances?

Very. It was a hot ticket and you almost had to stand in line to get a ticket. So it was very well attended.

Do you have any sense of the type of audience that was attending these performances?

At first, it was strictly classical, and I don't remember much else. The casinos had pop-type shows, but this was basically classical music.

Do you have any sense of whether money was coming in from this national organization?

I don't think the national organization helped them financially. I think they probably had to pay a fee to the national organization, as later we did with Young Audiences.

Are there any really memorable performances that stand out in your mind?

I remember Thomas Hampson, and I remember they did have some dance groups that were really good. They tried to get a blockbuster first concert to get people energized to buy tickets. Fifty years ago, almost, it's hard to remember.

Were these the sort of performances you could bring kids to?

They were basically adult programs. The last few years they have had a policy that the artists who come to town agree to go out to one school and perform there. Then I think they hand out some free tickets to students or parents that want to come. They've done a good job with community outreach. It just hasn't helped them that much.

What impact do you feel that the Community Concerts had on Reno?

Well, not a huge one, because there was a small potential audience when you take into consideration the entire population. We were a, I don't know, blue-collar town. Generally, there's not that much interest, but there were enough people here that supported it. It did very well for quite a while.

Prior to this period of competition with all these other groups, was it able to ever pick up speed?

I wouldn't say it picked up speed. When I was involved, it was in pretty high gear all along. I remember having to get my season ticket early because they sold out. Of course, they had a much smaller venue when they were in the State House, but they did very well at Pioneer for quite a few years.

Was it filling up Pioneer?

Yes, it was for quite a while.

When did the competition start to detrimentally impact Community Concerts?

The Reno Philharmonic's first concert was in 1969. Reno Concerts (which used to be Washoe Country Community Concerts) started here in 1934. [They were] the first one. So that's way back when, and they were a going concern when I moved to town. Nevada Opera started in 1968, and the Chamber Orchestra started a little bit later in 1974. So in all that time Community Concerts were still doing okay, but I think these other groups drained off a lot of the audience for them.

So the Nevada Opera and the Philharmonic were opening around the same time as Pioneer. Do you think that those were related at all?

Well, sure. Now they had a decent venue to play in. The Opera first started in the old Reno Little Theater building, and that was a hoot. I think the side wings in the back were about the size of this room—very tiny. I remember them saying they couldn't have great big casts and they couldn't do much with sets and scenery. It was a very cozy, nice place to watch an opera if you didn't know much about opera, which I didn't. I went to one opera at least the first year they started.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the Reno Little Theater building?

It was a neat old brick building, and one of the old Reno buildings. I can't tell you much about it because, frankly, I did not go to the plays. I did go to the operas. They were probably there two or three years, until they moved into Pioneer.

You mentioned that the State Building was located where the Pioneer is now. Besides the library and some performances, do you remember what other function the State Building served?

As far as I know, that was it. I don't think they had any state offices, for instance, there. It was a pink building. I don't remember too well, but I think it was not a harsh pink, but a pale pink.

Do remember Pioneer being built?

Yes, and I remember that hole in the ground. I thought they were digging to China because basically the theater is underground.

It went down and down and down. In fact, it is below the water table, which has caused some problems when we have had a big flood.

It actually was designed by the business community. They wanted a convention center where they could hold meetings, so acoustics were not top priority when that place was built. They've done a lot of tweaking with the acoustics ever since. I think they're pretty good, but they still have to mic some singers. Well, actually the opera singers can break glass at a hundred yards, but to get the sound out, they've done a lot of tweaking. I've been around that building since it was built, especially over the last twelve or thirteen years. My interests are gardening now, and so I did the landscape and still help take care of it.

What's the gardening group that you work with?

Master Gardeners. I designed the landscaping and I have a wonderful crew of volunteer gardeners that take care of the place. We have a lot of fun. We call it adult mud pies—it's not exactly artistic. I do care very much about the building. It's a national historical monument now, and it is one of the only type of building with a geodesic dome. You've probably heard it called the Golden Turtle.

When it was built as a geodesic dome, how did people react?

Oh, that was a big deal. I think Buckminster Fuller designed it. I don't know. There have been a lot of changes for the good in the last ten or so years. They've really upped the ante there. Potentially it is not technically an economic unit. I think you have to have about two thousand seats. When they first built it, I

don't who the site architect was, but they had to cut out three hundred seats because they could not see the stage from those seats. Then it was way undersupplied with bathrooms. That's been remedied now, so it's a pretty good place.

When Pioneer opened, did it change culturally what was available in Reno?

Yes, I think it did. Now, as I say, the Opera started in the Little Theater because they were really bare bones at first. Ted and Deena Puffer moved out here from Boston and started this opera company. At first, their operas were all in English because they thought that would play better. They did the translations, and some of their translations are used all over the world now. They were linguists, really. Now they have the original languages in supertitles.

When Pioneer first opened and people were going to it to attend these performances, what was the state of downtown?

The town had not sprawled the way it has now. Everything was downtown, and even the locals went downtown. The department store was downtown and some specialty shops. Downtown was a draw at that point. I think being across from the Courthouse helped the Pioneer quite a bit. Actually, now I feel it's a very nice part of downtown and a lot of people don't realize it. They have done a lot of stuff like the Riverwalk to improve that area.

As the nature of downtown changed over the years, was there a time when going down to Pioneer was unsavory?

No, that's where you went. The things that most people were interested in were downtown.

Did Pioneer help...?

Bring things up? I think so. I have never felt unsafe, and I go to a lot of performances by myself at night. I've never had a problem. I'm sure there have been problems somewhere, but when you have a lot of people going to a concert or leaving [at the same time] you're generally not going to have problems. We've had a few street people around, and in my gardening times I see a few, but I've never had a problem with them. Actually, most of them are pretty nice, so I've never had a problem. The city has really tried to get them off the streets, but they're still around.

Over the years, has there been any sort of general shift in who's performing at Pioneer or nationally what's coming to Pioneer?

Actually, there has. The biggest change has been the Broadway Show Series, and that's been a great benefit for Pioneer. That really fills the place up, and they, frankly, make money. For the in-town groups like the Opera and the Philharmonic and the Ballet, Pioneer gives them a special rate to because they want to support the local entities. That place is extremely busy.

A couple years ago the director told me that there was something happening in that building over two hundred days a year. They have to rehearse some and then [there are] the performances. The Opera went from one performance to two, and the Philharmonic went from one to two. So did the Chamber Orchestra, although they're up at the university at Nightingale Hall. I'm not thrilled with what's happened with some of the growth, but it is one thing that's broadened the audiences for all the arts, so that's good.

I read that in the mid eighties and early nineties, Pioneer wasn't being used that much.

I don't, frankly, remember this specifically, but I'm sure it's true. Although the school district uses it. They have concerts for school children. It's been quite a few years [that they've done that]. They bring all the students from one grade level in Washoe County (including Gerlach), for a program by the Philharmonic. The Philharmonic now sponsors two, possibly three, Youth Orchestras. So they use it for their concerts.

They also have some of these commercial Children's Theater groups come through town and they have performances at Pioneer. I have ushered some of them, and I'm sure they're still coming.

How long were you ushering at Pioneer?

I retired from ushering to be a gardener. I ushered probably for about five years in the nineties. I remember what got me started—I wanted to go see The Chieftains (the Irish group), and I didn't want to pay the ticket price, so I signed up to usher. I did that quite a few years. They have a full usher corps now that is all volunteers. When Young Audiences used to do school concerts there, we had ushers from the membership. The Opera used to have its own ushers who were all volunteers. I think it is a much better, more systematic thing now because they're better trained and they know the auditorium better. They never paid ushers, though.

Are they allowed to stay for the performances after they've ushered?

If they usher, they're there, but they don't sit in audience seats. Some of them have to stand part of the time. They staff the coatroom and the lobby, and they're stationed around the floor because they have to be able to evacuate the place in case of emergency.

What are some of the memorable performances that you've seen at Pioneer?

I remember one especially. It was a Youth Orchestra performance. I was ushering downstairs in the main part and the power went off. I definitely remember that. They do have an emergency light, but you can just barely see. You can't read by it. I waited a couple of minutes, and I could sense the children were getting nervous. You could hear this little buzz. So I went down with my flashlight and stood there to let them know there was somebody around. I was thinking, "Are we going to have to evacuate these kids?"

At that moment, they were doing a Star Wars presentation, and the son of the orchestra leader was dressed up as Luke Skywalker with a glowing light saber. He came out and started to direct the youth orchestra. They played "Stars and Stripes Forever" in the dark, without lights on their music stands. I definitely remember that. The lights came on after about five minutes. That is my main memory of Pioneer.

I remember the guitarist Carlos Montoya. I was sitting right in the front row because of my guitar interest. That was one of these electric evenings where he was connecting with the audience and they with him. It was just a glorious evening. A couple years ago Itzhak Perlman came. I remember that because he's such a nice person. He just related to the audience and they with him.

Do you remember any renovations that Pioneer's gone through?

Oh, a ton. The first thing they had to do was get rid of the asbestos, which was a big deal. That was all up in the roof, so that doesn't show. Before they couldn't book anything in the summer because the air conditioning was

practically nonexistent, so they tweaked that. I remember when they got the first system in, somebody up in the balcony complained because it was too cold. There was air blowing right on her.

The building is quite comfortable, but you wouldn't believe.... Before a summer performance, they have to run the air conditioning for about three days to chill it down because when all the bodies get in there, it heats it up.

They probably have to get it ice cold before anyone arrives.

Pretty much, yes. They also had to replace all the seats, which was very expensive. The administrator of that building, Willis Allen, has done a great job of getting funding—grants and things like that. He's well connected and he knows how to get what he needs, and he keeps it very nice. They replaced some of the carpet. They put some fuzzy fabric on the walls. It looks nice. Now they're hanging art up there. Everything's clean. We master gardeners pick up trash outside as well as the staff. When you keep things picked up, you don't get as much stuff. We don't have as many cigarette butts as we used to. There are a couple of fellows on the staff, and they make the rounds every morning around the building and keep things picked up. It's not in our job description, but we do it.

What is the Young Audiences program?

Young Audiences started out in New York. It was, and it perhaps still is, a national program that puts professional artists in the schools. They are not amateurs—they are professional. Young Audiences got money from the Music Performance Trust Fund to help, and we had to raise money ourselves. I

can't remember when I got active. A friend of mine was spearheading it and she kind of dragged me into it. They didn't charge the schools. They put two performances in every one of the elementary schools, free to the school. They had to stop that after a while because they couldn't sustain it.

These were local artists. For instance, the Brass Quintet were all members of the Philharmonic. They had a string quartet who were all members of the Philharmonic. It was essentially classically geared at first. They had a ballet group. A pair of the dancers from *Hello Hollywood* participated.

They have changed, though, as their funding went down. They finally had to disaffiliate from the national group. Now Pioneer actually runs that program. They call it Pioneer Performances. They have local people, but they're very interesting. They have a Chinese person that does dance and things like that. They've gone more to single artists because they can afford them. They have a magician. They have a small Pacific Islander group. I think they have had some local Japanese drummers. So they're still involved.

Then when the Community Concerts, or now they call it Reno Concerts, has brought groups or people to town, they also go out to at least one school and do an assembly there.

So it was a program where performing groups of various sorts were going to different elementary schools, but then there also would be field trips from elementary schools to Pioneer as well?

Yes, with the Philharmonic and also the Youth Orchestra, which is run by the Philharmonic. It was both. They wanted kids to have a theater experience.

I remember ushering and some of the kids wanted to know where the popcorn machine was. [laughter] Most of them had never been

to Pioneer before. The purpose was to give them that experience [of going to Pioneer] and to give kids, all the kids, a professional artist experience so they knew.... The artist would play and they were selected and very carefully evaluated. There was either a teacher or somebody from Young Audiences at most of the concerts to see how things went. I think it was a good program.

Where was the program getting their funding?

They got some from the Nevada Arts Council. When I first started, funding came from a music performance trust fund that came from music unions. I believe they took some of the union dues and put them in the trust, because, actually, that rolled over into work for professional musicians. Also, many of us went out on the street begging, trying to raise money from businesses and individuals.

The school district, when they were taking kids to the theater, threw in the school buses, which is a big deal. It's expensive. We did not have to pay for that. I don't know whether the school district paid for the auditorium rental. They had to pay something....

Can you tell me a little bit more about the fundraising you did?

It probably wasn't as professional as it gets nowadays. They didn't have grants then, so you just had to raise it from your friends and contacts with businesses. I've been cold-calling some businesses, which isn't terribly successful. We found out, and this was interesting, that it was easier to get a large contribution from some of these businesses than a small one. I can't remember whether the casinos were particularly supportive or not.

I was executive secretary and president for about three years, but that was a long time ago. At first, I was one of the flunkies. Then I was president of the board for maybe one year or two years. They decided they really needed to hire an executive secretary, so I did that for a couple years. That is when my desk started to get so messy. I'm not really a great executive, but I can run a group. We weren't in dire financial straits at that point, so it was all right. That was a low-pay position.

We occasionally sponsored outside companies, usually a dance company. We had the Las Vegas Ballet, and we had the wonderful American Folk Ballet from Los Angeles. They would come to Reno and do a week's residency. There was a group from Utah that came over. It might have been Ballet West. That was nice because these companies would go into schools to do outreach and then do a public performance after that. That was a good thing.

What did being a board member and the executive director entail for you?

The purpose of a board member is to raise money, so I tried. I did my best. After I resigned, we did hire an executive director—Mike Hillerby. He has been very active culturally. He went on to be Governor Guinn's chief of staff. He got his start at Young Audiences. Ed Parsons was another executive director. Both of them did very well. Mike, especially, went on to bigger and better things.

What kind of performances would go out to the schools?

From early on, it was small groups. It was always small groups—never any more than four or five. As the money got tighter, the groups got smaller. They're quite small now.

At first it was strictly classical music, and then it started to evolve a little bit.

What happened, too, was when the Philharmonic got started, they wanted to do their own outreach, so those people were not available to us.

The Opera also did their own outreach. So I don't think the Opera was ever involved with Young Audiences. They have had a traveling group that would tour the state with these mini operas that had the kids dress up in costumes for some of the bit parts. That was a good program.

What was the importance of what Young Audiences did for the community and for students?

I think it was simply introducing them to a facet of the arts that they would not get otherwise. The schools have a pretty good music program, but it involves strictly the students in the schools, and not all of them participate. I think it's just nice to expose young people to things like music, because if you don't, your audiences of the future are going to tank.

Was there a program that the performers would present beyond the actual performance? How did they interact with the students?

The performers were selected to interact well with kids, and they all loved it. The programs were designed time-wise to fit kids' attention spans. They would do a shorter program, probably thirty minutes, for kindergarten through third grade. Then the upper grades would have a little longer performance, which involved some of the same stuff, but it was geared to their level. The artists would talk to the kids and explain the musical instruments or whatever was

involved. Sometimes they let the kids come up and touch the instruments. I don't think the string players did that, but the percussion people did. We had a percussion group, strings, and brass.

Would each school get one performance a year?

At first we gave them two performances. The principal could pick which group he wanted, assuming that they were available then. Then it evolved. We kept the same local groups but with a little change. I remember we had a wonderful harpist who performed for us in the schools. She later moved to Texas, but she had ties here in the city. We would book her for one week solid, morning and afternoons, so that she got paid a little bit and made it worth her while. We did it the same way with possibly some other performers. They were all selected because they enjoy children and could relate to them, and their programs were appropriate for the age groups.

Were there performances in every elementary school in Reno?

Oh, there were. Every school, at first, got two free performances. Then I don't know whether it dwindled to one free performance. They could get as many performances as they wanted if they could pay something—they were subsidized by Young Audiences. But, yes, every school had a performance. In the beginning of the year we would just contact their principals and say, "Hey, what do you want? These groups are available at these times. What do you want?"

[For the trips to Pioneer, they] started out with fourth graders, and the last few years they've taken at least two grades, and maybe three—third, fourth, and fifth. Fourth is the

anchor, partly because at that time.... I don't know what the string program is like now in the schools, but it didn't start until sixth grade or seventh. They were trying to get kids interested in middle school band and chorus, so that's why they picked those grades. We've always had educators on our board—usually the county school music director—so we get a lot of feedback that way.

Would the board meet monthly?

Yes, we had a meeting once a month and various things got talked about, but mostly money.

Is there anything else about Young Audiences that you'd like to include?

As I say, they gradually just could not keep up financially, so Pioneer Center took over. I have a schedule upstairs of what they're doing. It's not classical music. It's different stuff, as I say, with a lot of ethnic music. They had a group from Peru a couple of years ago that was traveling around to local schools. Peru is a very musical country. I've been down there and it's incredible. Those people just grow up knowing how to play the flute. I would guess there is no classical group or performer at all in that roster now. They like to do ethnic stuff.

Can you tell me about when the Nevada Opera it started?

The Opera's first performance was in 1968, and it was one of the war-horse operas like *La Bohème*. It was not *La Bohème* itself, or *Carmen* either. Carman had too big a cast for the Reno Little Theater.

Ted and Deena Puffer came from Boston. I don't know how they picked Reno, whether they just put a pin in a map, but they thought

the town was ready for opera. Of course, we had nothing like that. They put on two operas that year and only one performance each, with three hundred seats, if that, in the Little Theater. My husband liked it because he said you're right on top of the action, and the acoustics were excellent in there.

Were those early performances well attended?

Yes, they were. You can probably sell three hundred tickets pretty easily. I remember why [Ted Puffer] came—he had the vocal department up at UNR.

He was working up at UNR at the same time?

Yes. He was the head of the Vocal Music Department, and he developed some people like Dolora Zajick. She's a world-class (now semi-retired), mezzo soprano. She came through UNR, went to New York, eventually went to Russia and won third in the Tchaikovsky Competition. Then she took off. She's opened the Met with [Luciano] Pavarotti. She owned the part of Princess Amneris in *Aida*. She just owned that role. She's a mezzo. She sang with Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, and all the greats. She lives in Reno now. In fact, she comes to our church once in a while. We just all sing together, but when Dolora's there, god, you know it. She tones it down, but her voice is really too big for the room. She's interesting because she's a little short dumpy little lady you'd never notice on the street. She's very low-key, but god, can she sing.

That was one of Ted Puffer's people. A couple of other people didn't reach those heights, but went on. So, Ted ran the Vocal Department. They still have singing up there, but of course, he's long gone. He died a few years ago.

For these productions, would he find people locally?

At first they were mostly local people and some of his students. He couldn't afford to bring people in, but gradually they got away from that. Although, the Opera chorus has always been local. There were people around with good voices, so they would get some of the small parts.

Now they bring in [people for] the star parts, generally. These are people with excellent voices but they aren't way up there. The present artistic director also works down at Louisiana State University and he brings some of his top people in for these parts.

How would you describe the quality of the productions?

Good. Now it's, I would say, excellent. I'm not a music critic. For some years back, I don't know that you remember Jack Neal, who died a few years ago. He was a teacher and also the newspaper's music critic, and he gave the Opera a hard time occasionally. They maybe deserved it, although I didn't really notice. They did not like him very much, but he was telling it like it was. I would say the quality has certainly gone up, and it's good quality now. They're doing *Vanessa* this weekend.

It's a really strange kind of a dark opera. I've heard the music. They did a little promo where they played some recordings. It's not like *Carmen*, where you go out humming all the tunes, but the music is pretty good. It's definitely a twenty-first-century type of story except that it took place a long time ago.

You worked at the ticket office for a time?

I sold tickets for the Philharmonic and also the Opera as a volunteer several years.

I haven't done that for at least ten years. We have season tickets to the Phil and we sit at the top of the balcony in two little seats off to one side. I picked those because the acoustics are good up there, and I could finish with my ticket stuff and dash in there even after the performance started without upsetting people.

Where was the ticket office?

In the A-frame building, where the Veterans Memorial County Park is, right across the street from Pioneer to the south. They put it up in honor of the 1960 Olympics. Reno was the headquarters there, and they put up this A-frame building. After the Olympics, it became a little arts office. Young Audiences had the upstairs in the A-frame and the Opera and the Philharmonic had their administrative offices downstairs. Of course, now they've moved. The Opera actually has space in the basement of Pioneer because they just cannot afford to pay rent. The Phil and the Chamber are out at McKinley School. I hope the city gives them a good deal. The A-frame building was torn down and they made the Veterans Park. Good riddance. It was a crummy building.

Was there anyone else that was using that building?

The only ones I remember were these three art groups. Maybe there was somebody else, but I don't think so because it was not very big. It existed from the 1960s on up until... that park isn't that old. It [was built] within the last maybe five or ten years.

It's funny how quickly you forget what was there before.

Oh, yes. My son gave me the book of old Reno for Christmas and we remember most of the stuff in there. But, yes, something new comes in and you forget about the old. Sometimes, a lot of times, it's good riddance.

Were the Philharmonic and the Opera working in conjunction in terms of ticket sales?

No, they were sold separately.

But you were working and volunteering for both of them?

Yes, for both. The tickets were just so different then. We had a little box.... A friend of mine who was a woodworker made this box with little holes in it for all the tickets. You physically picked them out and marked them off. Things are different now. It's all computerized.

You used to actually give people tickets and mark them off of the list?

Oh, yes. Give them the tickets, mark them off the chart.

Do you remember, while you were selling tickets and involved in that sense, who was around and working at the Opera?

I remember Ann Smith was in charge of the tickets. I worked with her. I honestly don't remember. The conductors... Ted was not involved in that sort of thing, but they had a volunteer group. I think they probably had maybe one [staff person].

What are some memorable productions that the Opera's put on that you've enjoyed?

We've been to practically all of them. While Ted Puffer was here, he was interested

in new music. I remember *Of Mice and Men*. The composer, Carlisle Floyd, actually conducted the opera. That was good. It was not something you'd go out humming, but I thought that it was well done. Just beautifully done. Then they did a world premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Joan of Arc* that had never been done anywhere. Then, of course, the war horses—they've done some good *Carmens*.

What are some classic operas?

Well, I call it adult sex and violence. [laughter] Seriously. The classic operas, the war horses as they call them, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, and *Madame Butterfly*. The other one... there are some big crowd scenes in it. There's a great big drinking scene that's got a wonderful... it's great. With opera, people think, "Oh, I don't want to do that." I'm not really thrilled with some of these newer operas, but maybe younger people are.

They have done Gilbert and Sullivan quite a lot—*Pirates of Penzance* and some of those. They're fun, and yet my forty-five-year-old son hates them. They have a British sense of humor and they don't appeal to him at all. He'd rather see tragedy. So the war horses and Gilbert and Sullivan they have done frequently. Usually they do one of those a year.

They have to do something that sells tickets, and yet they get so tired of the same old same old. That's why they're doing *Vanessa* this year. I hope it sells some tickets, because they need to branch out. That's one thing that Ted Puffer did—world premieres and things like that. We've had to get away from that lately because they don't sell that well.

When Ted Puffer retired, did they go back to doing operas in the original language that they were written in?

Oh, they did even before he retired. That was always kind of his aim. Well, when supertitles came in.... Even if they're singing in English, you don't understand all the words. When twenty people are all screaming, you just don't. So they have these supertitles up above so you can see what they're saying. It's really neat. You ought to go. I'd say go to this one, but it's different. It's by Samuel Barber, so it'll be in English, but I hope they have supertitles anyway.

Then the next one is in April. It's a very well-known known one—The Marriage of Figaro. Another one that they've done a couple times is *Merry Widow*. That's a lot of fun—lots of waltzes and Strauss opera. I would say if you aren't into the heavy ones, go to the classic ones like *Pirates of Penzance* or *Merry Widow*. They're just a lot of fun. One thing is the younger generation like you just weren't brought up that way and exposed to it, but it's great. As I say, adult sex and violence.

What is the cost of attending?

Well, it's gone way up, of course. They've had to because the tickets do not pay cover everything. I've heard various things, some statistics that say the tickets only pay about a third of the cost of putting on these performances.

The Opera has gotten creative. One program they did was a concert version where they had no sets but they had costumes. That saved a lot of money. Originally when Puffer was here, they built their own sets, and they were great. They were really good, but it was expensive. Now what most of these outfits do is they rent sets from other communities or other companies. I don't think the companies own costumes. They rent them from a costume company, but it's terribly expensive. Opera is an expensive venture.

Two years ago they were in really dire trouble. I literally went begging around the neighborhood and I probably raised about a thousand bucks. They were just going to have to fold, but they over-subscribed the goal because people really came [out to help]. You can't do that all the time, though. The next year... they used to give three operas a year and then they cut it to two. The second one that year was a solo performance by a woman who had sung in leads in some of our operas, and she gave a wonderful concert. It was really good, and I don't think people felt deprived that they didn't get a second opera.

Beyond the ticket prices and your own fundraising effort, how does Nevada Opera pay for their productions?

They have cut to the bone. They let their executive director go a couple of years ago. They couldn't afford him. So now I think Steven Meyer is a volunteer. He's the executive director of sorts, and they have a couple volunteers, in the office. The artistic director, Michael Borowitz... I think for his day job he works down at Louisiana State University and also directs a summer opera program in Ohio.

The year after we had this big disaster, he said, "I'm not going to take any money next year." So he didn't, and I don't know whether they're paying him at all. He just comes out for the performances. Including rehearsals, he is probably here two weeks or so. He's very imaginative and he's got a great sense of humor. His shows are good.

What is the going rate for an opera ticket nowadays?

I could get my checkbook out. It's probably around maybe forty dollars. They try to keep it low but then it goes up. One thing, there are

no really horrible seats in that place. If you sit way over on the side, you miss a little bit of the back corner of the stage, but I think they try to stage those so that people can see. I've never felt too much deprived. I was at one of the Broadway shows the other day, though, and we were sitting on the side. I missed one little back corner that I maybe would've like to have seen occasionally.

How would you describe the attendance of the different operas?

They're pretty well attended. Let's put it this way—they could be better. I don't know the exact ticket count, but I would say it's close to a thousand. Sometimes it's more. It's a fourteen-hundred-seat theater. One of the *Carmens* they did fairly recently sold out. I would say if they got nine hundred to a thousand at each performance, that's about average.

A lot of it has to do with marketing. The Philharmonic put on a big new marketing scheme this year to try to attract younger people, and make it kind of pizzazzy. I'll be interested to see how it's done. They called it Get Your Culture On, which doesn't do much for me, but then I'm not the demographic that they're after, since they're trying to get young people. They had pictures of young people all dressed up and going out to dinner or something—having a big evening. So we'll see.

The Philharmonic is, I think, in the black. That's one reason they've had so many applications for music director. It's one of the few organizations that are in the black. Laura Jackson is doing a really good job. This is her second year.

Do you think that there's an issue of appeal that maybe the Nevada Opera is struggling with versus the Philharmonic which is doing okay?

There's this odd snob appeal about opera. Oh, it's for people with a lifted pinky, and the fat lady sings. Well, I'll tell you the leads they've had have been gorgeous. I remember at *Carmen*, my husband spent half the opera wondering whether she was going to come out of the top of her dress or not. There were pretty sexy costumes and good-looking singers. You don't have any real fat tenors or that sort of stuff. Most artists who have sung in Reno are young and on the way up. Pavarotti was about the last really tubby tenor that I remember.

They are all a little bit more fit.

Yes. Well, there are so many good singers now.

How would you compare Nevada Opera as it is today versus what you remember it being like when it was first getting started?

I would say it has roughly the same audience—mostly more older people. Some of the once younger people that are now old grew into it. I don't think the audience type has changed that much. It's all in marketing. The newspaper's been pretty good about publicizing stuff, but you have to get it to them.

That's one problem the Community Concerts had—they'd never been able to get anybody who knew how to really market well, and it's too bad. I don't know anything about marketing and so I didn't offer. I asked them if they got stuff into the community calendar, to just get it in the paper even though it is very brief. They said, "Well, we send it, but it doesn't get out." I wonder, because there are a lot of things that do get in there. Maybe they didn't get it in on time.

But again, they're amateurs. The last few years they've had young people running it, but they just didn't have the resources to do

it well. I'm very much afraid that next year will be their last year. They've got a meeting coming up in a few days and they said, "If we don't get some more help..." It's mostly about getting people to help, because there's a lot of work. They have to look at tapes and auditions, choose performers, and work with a little budget.

They had to move out of Pioneer. Last year they moved into that little black box theater called The Underground. The people of Pioneer have tried their best, but they have to charge them something, so now they're down at the Piano Gallery. I heard them say that if the Piano Gallery hadn't offered them that facility, they probably wouldn't be in business. So I feel bad for them.

Actually, the Piano Gallery is a neat place. You're real close [to the musicians]. It has maybe a hundred seats, but it's very nice. The programs they've had... they've got one coming up fairly soon with two guitarists that I'm really itching to go to. I think they're classical guitarists. They had somebody doing an imitation of Patsy Cline, and she was great. Kenn Pettiford has played a couple concerts. He's a local pianist and singer. He does Big Band songs and jazz. He is good.

For the Philharmonic, do you remember when they got going and what some of their early performances were?

I didn't go to them. Gregory Stone was the one who started it and I'll give him credit for that, but I don't think the orchestra people.... He was a lousy conductor, but he got it started. Some of the musicians, frankly, wouldn't play for him. He had to hire people from California sometimes.

He left and Ron Daniels came in, and Ron upped the ante quite a lot and did a good job

with the orchestra. I think he was there several years. They felt like they had done everything they could. Ron left, and Barry Jekowsky came in. He stayed for almost ten years. Laura Jackson has since come in.

I like the way they have chosen the last two conductors. They, first of all, get a ton of résumés and tapes. They winnow that down to four. It's a tough job, but the orchestra has some input along with the board and various other people. During the final year, after the previous conductor had left, they gave each contestant a concert. They had four different concerts, each conducted by one of the four finalists. Each got to select the music and the audience got to give their opinion. I'm sure the musicians have the most say, which they should. That is how they've selected the last two music directors, and it's been good.

The Philharmonic wants to do community outreach, so they don't want somebody who will simply do a concert in a hall. They go out and do a Pops on the River every July. They do a Fourth of July thing down in Minden-Gardnerville to spread it around. It's kind of fun. The Pops on the River is a costume party, and it's packed.

What performances have you attended and enjoyed in recent years?

Well, there are some I've liked a little better than others, but I have liked what they have tried to do. I think one of the orchestras—the Chamber or the Philharmonic—has commissioned a piece that's going to be played. They've done things like that. Barry Jekowsky especially liked American music, so he tried to program each concert with one American composer's work. I think you have to do that. You can't just go in for dead white men's music, although that's the music I really like. You have to keep moving along.

Considering the Philharmonic is in the black, are they just a better attended group?

Vis-à-vis the Opera, and even the Chamber Orchestra, a lot of people think, “Oh, chamber music. Yuck.” Chamber music is just music for smaller orchestras. They play a lot of the same repertoire that the Phil could. They went to two performances and they pretty well fill them. Nightingale is a six-hundred-seat hall, I believe. I’d say at the last concert, there were probably almost five hundred people there. And they’re all fundraising. I don’t go [to the fundraisers]. I give them a donation and we buy season tickets, but I generally don’t attend these fundraising events. They’re expensive. The Chamber Orchestra does it, and the Phil does it—dinner with the conductor or a special evening. They try to be different. I think one of them is doing a Valentine’s event. They have to. I mean, tickets just don’t cut it. All of them need to increase their audiences.

One thing that both the orchestras have done, which is very good, before the concert, the hour before it, the conductor gives a talk about the music, and that’s very well attended, and it’s good.

As someone who gives regular donations, are you privy to a lot of the fundraising materials that they send out?

Oh, yes, I get them all, but I don’t respond to all of them. I don’t get fundraising stuff from outfits that I don’t go to. We have a good ballet company, but I just don’t go very often even though I like ballet. This town has a lot of stuff going on. You could be out, and I sometimes am, two or three nights a week attending different things. This is my first year with OLLI, but I’m enjoying the classes that I’ve been to.

Over the years that you’ve lived here, is that a big change that you’ve seen—what’s available?

Oh, yes. Huge. What’s happened, and what’s probably hurt some of these other outfits, is the clubs.... They used to have one star in for two weeks, but now they have these mega concerts of star people. Sometimes I know who they are, but they’re designed for the younger generation, and they have a lot of them. Gad, practically every casino has some pretty good concert every weekend, and that drains off money. You can’t do it all.

The culture scene is just vastly different, though. Summer Artown is a wonderful idea. It used to be everything was free, but what they have done is they started having maybe one big ticket item. Now they found out that they do better if they have those blockbuster shows during the winter. I have been to most of them, including the Soweto Gospel Choir and Itzhak Perlman. I missed the Alvin Ailey dance concert last time because we had house guests. Those things are just blockbusters. They have them down at the Grand Sierra and they fill up that room.

That’s a pretty big theater.

It’s huge. It is eighteen hundred seats, I think. What’s nice is you can get tickets for twenty-five bucks, which I do. You’re right up against the back wall, but the acoustics are fine and you can see as well as anybody. I don’t like to be too close anyway. I think Artown is wonderful. Beth Macmillan has done a real good job orchestrating that.

What has changed in Reno to make it more conducive to cultural activities?

I think the increase in population has meant you widen your potential audience. A

little town—Reno was fifty thousand or less when we moved here—could not support all these things. They just couldn't. Then you had people moving in that were used to things. In fact, a lot of people I know of from California, especially, were absolutely amazed and delighted at what was here.

They were surprised by what they found when they came here?

Yes. I know the rabbi up at the temple is fairly new—[she and her husband moved here] a couple years back—and they love classical music. A friend of mine who's active in that group said they were just blown away by everything that they could do here.

Did you attend any of those casino shows?

We're cheapskates, but my husband is a fraternity brother of Bill Harrah and John Ascuaga. In fact, the Ascuagas and we were next-door neighbors in a duplex when we first got married, so that's how we met them.

Bill Harrah was very interested in starting a local chapter of the fraternity, and so he tried to gather all the alums. We would have what technically was a meeting at a major show down at Harrah's club with five dollars for dinner, and, say, Sammy Davis, Jr. performing. So, yes, we did go to some of the shows, but we didn't really pay our freight. The shows were great.

Did the musicians for the casino shows feed into these other groups that were around?

Our former neighbor had the orchestra down at Harrah's and some of his musicians traveled around. Some of them would work up at Lake Tahoe when they had house bands. When the Philharmonic first got started, they had their concerts on Tuesday nights because that was

the club musicians' night off and they could get people to perform for the Phil. If you play in the Phil, you need a day job. Most of the players now are schoolteachers and university people.

Has the shift in the nature of the shows at the casinos affected the other groups?

Oh, yes. It put a lot of musicians out of work. It was really hard on them. One of them went to law school because he just didn't have a job anymore. The traveling shows usually bring their own musicians, and you can see why. They're giving one concert. They need their own people because they can't rehearse a bunch of locals who may be very good musicians, but they can't do it that way. So, you bet, that made a big difference in the musical world.

Are there things that I haven't asked you about that you would like to include?

This is not musical at all, but I have a little bit of the history of the Nevada Museum of Art. I remember when it was a little house on Ralston Street—very small and very low-key. Then they moved up to the house on Ridge Street. You know which house I mean? They had a gallery there for quite a few years and then they started building the [new museum].

Well, in the meantime, while it took them a couple years to build the new one, they used the exhibition hall of Pioneer for an art gallery. Some of those sculptures like the stone man (the sculpture with the stones in the cage), were out on the plaza at Pioneer. It was a good deal for the museum and it was a good deal for the Pioneer, too, because they got a little rent out of it.

Now, of course, the museum has this splendid building. I hope they're doing all right. They realized that museums can't be

static. They have to have traveling exhibits, and they've done a great job with that.

How does Reno as a community affect culturally what we have available?

Well, as I said, the sheer size of the community is a big factor. We have a lot of different people. We have a lot more people that can support all these things. The culture scene is vastly different than when I arrived here, and I think that's good. I'm not real happy with a lot of the growth and the sprawl, but at least we have a lot of good things. I hope we can sustain them.

As a community, how do you think Reno benefits from culturally what's available to them today?

Well, in dollars and cents.... You have payrolls and people buying. I would say it aerates the atmosphere. It's a wonderful thing for the town, and it attracts a lot of people too. People come from the Lake and from way out in the boonies to go to these things. The only thing that stops them is snow. I think it's definitely been a good thing for the community. I like it.

Another thing that I love about Reno is the arts are so accessible. I used to live near Washington D.C. I never went to the concerts, although it's easier to get down to the Kennedy Center now. It was just a big production. You had to start several hours ahead of time to get there, and either park or find your way on the Metro or a bus. It's a lot of hassle. Plus the prices are lower out here. But people brag about how New York has a wonderful culture scene. A lot of these big cities are, but the average Joe doesn't get there.

But here in Reno you would say that....

Well, there's more of that. I mean, the average Joe is probably down having a beer

at the bar watching a football game. But, for instance, I can be seated door to door in fifteen minutes from this house. I mean, that's nifty. It's so easy.

When you go to Pioneer, where do you park?

I never pay for parking. I usually park in one of bank parking lots. They don't bother you. Also, since they tore down the Pioneer Casino that was immediately south of the courthouse—where that big parking lot is now.... They tore that down and the plan was, and maybe still is, to build a parking garage. Well, we were thrilled at Pioneer because people bitch about no parking. I say, "Come on. You don't want to walk a half a block?" Now you can park there after five and on weekends, so that's helped a lot of people. The accessibility is certainly there.

UNR usually is pretty good. Well, I have issues with that place too, but at least in the evenings I just pull into the Brian Whalen Parking Complex and park there. I don't use the handicap stickers but my husband has a handicap sticker. I just put it up. I figure nobody's going to bother.

Oh, the parking.... My son took graduate classes there when he was a teacher. Well, he couldn't get to anything till four o'clock, and so he was always in a rush to get to the four o'clock class. Sometimes he'd park down in that lot because he had to get to class, and he got a couple tickets. He said, "There's nobody in the darn lot after four o'clock."

I belong to the Arboretum Society, and we were potting some plants for a plant sale. UNR has some tiny greenhouses, ancient ones, behind the Ag Building, and we were in there. Well, the nearby parking meters were for only fifteen minutes. Now, come on. I ended up parking down Valley Road and walking a little bit like everybody else does.

CLAUDIA HOFFER

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me about where you born and where you grew up?

Claudia Hoffer: I was born in southern California and grew up there, although I did live a few years on the Mojave Desert and then in Independence, California. I went back to Los Angeles and then moved here to Reno in 1953 with my family.

Can you tell me about your parents?

My parents were born in Los Angeles. My father's father was unique in that he brought the first automobile to California. We have pictures and various mementos of those, and that was always interesting to our family. My grandmother was big into politics, and my father and mother were educated, all in the Los Angeles area. My dad worked for Lockheed. All the males over the age of thirty-five during the Second World War worked there, and he was very successful there. My mother worked for the Los Angeles County for many years. She worked in Juvenile Hall,

so I guess that is adolescent childcare. Each of their families was located and centered in Los Angeles.

When I finished high school and started college, that was when the war came along, and I met a young man—a soldier from Nevada. After the war we were married and he wanted to come back to Nevada. So we went back to Elko. We moved to Los Angeles where he went through college on the G.I. Bill, and we then moved here. He was a dentist. He is long gone; he died some time ago.

Can you describe the schools you went to?

Well, Los Angeles City Schools...I remember that I was in those schools for about the first three grades. I have to tell you that I saw my first cow when I was in kindergarten, when some educational group brought the cow to the school. I remember that. I was very impressed with the fact that I found out where milk came from.

My father was not well as a young man. This was during the Depression that

I'm talking about now. He finally did get a job. He worked for the Los Angeles water company that built Boulder Dam. We moved to Victorville, and I was in school there for a couple years, and there he continued to work for Los Angeles Water & Power.

We moved to Independence for a few years. Then the war started. He had extensive airplane experience as a younger man. We moved back to Los Angeles and he went to work for Lockheed as an electrical engineer type. In fact, he oversaw putting in all the electrical work into P-48s, which were the big pursuit airplanes during the war.

During the war, I married. Well, he went away off to the war to the Air Force in England to be a pilot. He came back after the war. He became ill and they sent him back. We decided that we should take advantage of the G.I. Bill, so he started college. We lived in Los Angeles then, again surrounded by our family—my family and some of his.

He went through USC in their dental program, and I stayed at home that time. I had two children. I wanted to get back to college, so whenever my mother could babysit...I took some classes along the way.

We moved up here to Reno. I wanted to finish school, and the only place in Nevada that had higher education was Reno. Las Vegas was a drive-through at that time. So that brought us here.

My son is now a physician in Los Angeles, and my daughter lives here. She worked for some time at Rancho San Rafael until she experienced an accident and hurt her back. She is now retired.

Can you tell me about the shock of moving from L.A. to Elko to Reno?

Well, we were not in Elko very long. Yes, it was shock, because most of my growing-up

years were in Southern California. It didn't bother me so much in Elko because it was time pending until the next step, and that was only for a year. Then we moved back to Los Angeles, and that is when he went through school. We already had the two children.

Moving here then, the population was 40,000 in Greater Truckee Meadows, including Sparks and the local farms. It was very hard for me to get used to, especially the gambling. I felt strongly against it, and do now, only now I ignore it. It was pretty impressive to me at that time, though.

We bought a house and there was no place you could just go and buy furniture. You had to order everything, which was strange. It took me a couple of years to get used to it and to be at all comfortable. I met nice people and that part was all right. It was just such a different environment.

What kind of cultural activities had you been exposed to in L.A. prior to coming to Reno?

Well, in Los Angeles there was everything. We lived on the periphery out in the San Fernando Valley, and then moved into Highland Park, which is closer in to Los Angeles or Pasadena. I was a stay-at-home mom and we didn't have any money. Nobody got rich on the G.I. Bill. My mother lived there, but she worked. When my brother came back from the service, he helped. I was home all the time with two children and no money. That was about it in terms of cultural things.

When my children were small, we lived fairly close to a Los Angeles Park, a big park system, and so there were quite a few activities. There was a big library in that building with activities for little children, and I used to take my kids there. I did become involved with a Toastmistress group, kind of a right hand to the Toastmasters. My husband studied and

studied. That meant I was home and happy for the nearby library. Those were pretty difficult years.

Can you tell me more about the library?

It was big because it was in Highland Park...I do remember the children's section. They had a very large children's section and that was nice. In fact, I read to my kids as they grew up, and even later. At their insistence, I finally quit reading to them when they were about ten years old. They always wanted me to read, so the three of us would sit down and they would watch. If I misread a word, they were happy to tell me. That was an important part of our family life because of the lack of funds. Well, certainly part of it was that my own family at home read all the time. In fact, we all read even at the dinner table. If you didn't have a book, nobody would talk to you. [laughs]

Reading was a big part of my life, happily. Both of my kids still read a lot, even my son with all of his work. He and his partner have labs—he's a pathologist—in about six hospitals over in the San Moreno area. It is over toward Mt. Wilson, in that area. He still reads. We chat together.

A nice habit to cultivate in your kids when they were young.

It was perfect, I thought. They're smart kids, still.

What kinds of things surprised you about Reno?

Well, it was just so foreign overall, although I'll have to admit I liked it a lot better than I liked Elko. At that time, immediately after the war, I think there were 5,000 people in Elko.

I thought people were very hospitable and nice. With my husband being a professional, we met other professional people and met some people who are still friends, some of whom are at the university or have retired from the university. There was this one retail-stores-sponsored group that had a luncheon for new people. They called it Newcomers, and it's still in existence. Somebody told me there are about four or five hundred people in it now. Early on, you had to leave after you had been in it a year because new people were coming and they didn't want it to get very big, but that really was great for me to meet other people.

I became involved in Cub Scouts because my son was that age. As he moved along, my daughter came along, I was involved in Girl Scouts, and so I met a lot of nice people in those groups.

One year after we moved here, when it was possible to go to school without paying out-of-state tuition, I went back to school up at the University of Nevada. That was the beginning of my long trek through higher education.

What was UNR like at that time?

I was a sophomore when I started because of the earlier classes that I had in Los Angeles. It fit in very well with Reno because the school was small and Reno was small. I had classes in the old Education Building. The Student Union was in the basement of one of the main buildings. It was an older building which at that time was adjacent to Morrill Hall. The old building which is now the Clark Administration Building was the library. I was very impressed with that. It was so big and had lots of books, although I'd been used to the books in Los Angeles. This was a much older building.

Gambling was so prevalent at that time. Well, it always has been. I had a lesson one

time. I was in the PTA, of course (I always was, till high school when I got to stop). I was asked to go with another woman to Harolds Club to ask for a donation for the school for whatever it was. I went with this other woman and we went into Harold Smith's office, and the secretary said, "Oh, fine," because they knew we were coming. We sat down and waited while other people came and went

I began to feel, by how we were treated by this secretary, that we were not really very important or nice. We were there asking for money. We finally got in and they gave us some money, but I never, ever did anything like that again. A Fundraiser I am not. It was a short career.

It was interesting to me to see the teachers as they moved around in the system. I remember one teacher that I just went in to chat with. Diane, my daughter, was in the second grade, so I just went in. I don't imagine I was called in; I'm sure not. I went in to meet her and had a nice conversation with her. Later we were both in AAUW. She is much younger. Later we were in one of the large AAUW social occasions and she told everybody that I was the first mother who ever treated her like she was a person, and I was surprised at that. I was surprised that she would remember that and mention that. I guess I thought teachers were people.

My kids went along. They were always very successful and had class-level offices all the way along, I was happy about that. Of course their dad and I encouraged academics as important, and that worked out very well.

My daughter, much to my dismay, was short eight hours from graduation at the university. She had been married along the way and divorced, had two kids and worked, but I encouraged her to go to school on top of all of that. Then she fell and broke her leg and had to be out for a while and she never

went back. She said, "I can't tackle all that again. I've been going to college for thirteen years." Academia has been a big part of our life, though.

You took some art classes at UNR, right?

Oh, yes, I loved to. I had a few classes because of the elementary program, but because I liked art...I still do follow where it goes—fine arts in many descriptions. It had a number of classes in some buildings which are no longer on the campus. They were at the low level on the east side of the campus, and these were wooden buildings which had been barracks for soldiers during the Second World War. They were still up and they were used as classrooms for art and also for English classes. I had two English classes then. I became very active in the art section. Because I was an older student, I became acquainted with some of the art professors, and that kind of expanded to other art activities throughout Reno. That was a nice thing as that expanded.

I finished school here with a master's and I taught for a couple years, but then I decided that teaching was not my big passion. So I went back, to Arizona State University, and got a PhD in Counseling in Educational Psychology. I wanted to come back to Reno because my daughter was here at that time and I liked Reno. Reno is a beautiful area, and I wanted to come back, so I did. I didn't want to move to another state, and I was not young anymore. I became involved in some different fine arts programs, which were important to me.

In terms of the people at the university, I remember going to what then was the art museum. It was on Ralston Street in a house that Dr. Church, an early university supporter of the art program, had donated to the university for an art building. I was

still working at that time, so I continued to participate in and follow the art programs. In those early days, there was a musical organization...We became involved in a musical program. I don't think it was a national program, but certainly a program in the West. It featured traveling, quite high-level musical productions, presentations, and concerts called Community Concerts. That was in existence before I first came to Reno. It still may be in existence, many years later... thirty years later that I know of. I joined in 1953, thereabouts. Many later recognizable musicians came here in the early days to present concerts. That was an important part, and nice for Reno. It was the only thing other than the downtown clubs.

Then shortly, a while after I started with that, the initial development of the now Reno Philharmonic...the early days of that struggled in Reno. For quite a few years Gregory Stone, an older musician and the leader of the group, was responsible. He was responsible for moving that along. I think he had a hard time, lack of money, and lack of participation. Reno was still pretty small for a serious concert group. It went on, though, and now it's a large group that my husband and I both support.

Do you remember any of the professors or the people you met in the Art Department?

I met two academic wives at the Welcome Wagon luncheons; one was Dr. Ryser's wife. I met his wife there, and my husband and I played bridge with Dr. Ryser and his wife, Janet, for quite a few years. I never was crazy about bridge, so I kind of dropped out of that.

It was interesting in the way things happened in this world, that one day many years later I was on the campus, I saw Dr. Ryser. He knew that I had a son who was in

college, and he said, "Do you think your son would be interested working at the hospital, Washoe Med?"

I said, "I'll ask him." By that time my son was a sophomore there. He was going to go into dentistry, but he needed the job. So he followed through on that and decided he would go into medicine instead. He's followed that and now he's very successful. It is funny to see how things happen and how one thing happens to another.

Another art teacher that I had some classes from, Ed Yates, I had met his wife, Margaret, at the luncheon at Welcome Wagon. So I had several classes from him for different kinds of art. I can't remember who suggested it...our two families—he, his wife, and two boys, and my husband, my two kids, and I became friends. The two men decided they would exchange professional courtesy, so my husband did their dentistry and we received many art pieces that Ed had done. In fact, the big painting over the fireplace there is his, and then I have some other pieces of his, how many years later? It's funny, isn't it? Those were from the very beginning.

As I met other women, teachers, and professors at the university, we became friends and I pursued more just from a women's exchange standpoint. When I talk about it, I realize that has been a very big part of my life, that whole thing. I did not aspire to making a million or anything like that, so I was happy.

You mentioned you became involved in the Community Concerts through these connections at the university, is that right?

Early on, yes. Then I think of some other people that I met in different ways. The Community Concerts, even though they were a national traveling group, had a local board, and I was asked to be on that. Then a little

later, my husband was also. The board's duty was to select from the big list of musical artists that were available, and so we chose for five concerts a year, which is similar to the Reno Phil time-wise.

I was on that board for quite a few years, and met a woman there who was the wife of one of the counselors that I had met when I was working in the Washoe County school system before I left and went back to Arizona for my Ph.D. I still see the same pattern. It was more pronounced early on, that, in this case, when I followed my interest around town, art, music, all of this.... There are the same people that you see every place that we go to, who have similar interests. That's one of the differences between Los Angeles and here, because that was not true there. Although my circumstances, of course, are much different because I've lived here almost sixty years.

What kinds of performances did Community Concerts perform?

Well, concerts. For most of them, people sang. For some of the concerts, people played musical instruments. There was a small group of musicians here that accompanied these people. That made it so that music was available to the people who sang.

I'm trying to think of the name of a woman who came, who later became one of the best-known vocalists in the world. She came from Australia. There were some fine musicians, and there were dancers. The [Alvin] Ailey group, was a group of black dancers which are famous all over the world now. In fact, there was a presentation about two months ago by one of the offshoots of this same group that came thirty years ago. Here is this offshoot, with the same name and same thing. That makes it kind of interesting.

Do you remember where the Community Concerts were held?

Oh, yes. In the old State Building, which was really dreadful by the time they took it down. It was on the spot where the Pioneer Theater is now. It was not a comfortable place to go. It was old and the seats were old. Everything was old.

On the back of the State Building, with a separate entrance, was the Reno Library, and that was small. When you asked about the other one that I went to in Los Angeles, the Reno Library was very small in comparison. Again, you saw the people who had similar interests there.

I started going to the "Great Books" meeting because I had heard about it in Los Angeles. Here there were five of us in this group, but we were stalwart supporters. We went every month and discussed books, but that terminated. One of the members, a woman, committed suicide, and so the rest of us decided we were not going to continue at that time.

Interesting as it is and as small as the world is, thinking of what is offered at OLLI now, I participate in another Great Books organization. It is another group that meets twice a month at the OLLI. That's lasted at least fifty years that I know of, and it goes on and on.

In the State Building, was there one large auditorium where the performances were held?

Oh, yes. Similar building...well, not in the architectural aspect, but it was one big building. I don't remember ever going into a basement there, but it was a couple stories. It was stuccoed and painted pink. I don't know how that happened in Reno. It always was, as long as I remember, until they pulled it down

and built a new building. It was good-sized and was used for many different occasions. The hotels had some fair-sized rooms for their entertaining, but the State Building was for serious things.

How well attended were the Community Concerts?

Not a lot of people showed up. We paid an annual fee, as the Reno Phil does now, and it is the same people, there again, [who attended]. I don't know. Reno is so small. I guess maybe a hundred people would show up, but that was quite a few for Reno. It was in the wintertime, which was more difficult to get around then. There were academic people involved in that too, and that was really helpful to Reno. It is interesting over a period of time to see the development of programs such as Community Concerts that start out small and then the people add to it more and more.

When I finished my master's, I was accepted into the PhD program at Arizona State, and so I was gone off and on for the next few years. I came back in the summertime because it was so blasted hot down there in Tempe. Two of my friends, Annette Herz, (her husband, Robert Herz, was of the longtime Reno Herz family), and my other friend, June Seyforth (who was married to a local dentist), were both big musicians. The time I was gone, they were involved in what was the developing Philharmonic group. They must have been. Each of them promoted music and they tried to get a little small group started—a string group—but that didn't work so well.

They decided they wanted to get something bigger, and so they decided to sponsor, because each of them had some funds, an opera group to try to get one started. I don't know just what they did in the way of

research. There was a group then, a private group of musicians, but because I was gone for the school year, I was not involved, nor did I have any place in it. I'm not a musician; I'm only a listener. [laughs]

The particular summer I was back in town, they told me they were pushing to get the opera group started and did ask me if I wanted to come to dinner at the Seyforth's house. They had invited the Puffers—Ted and Deena Puffer. Ted was music teacher at the university, and a top voice. He must have also taught some instrumental program. I don't remember that, but I know that he later became fairly well known beyond Reno for his teaching of voice students

At the dinner, Annette and June proposed an organization to put together that opera group. The Puffers were both interested. June had something to do with arrangements for one thing and another. I know she was involved with that. Ted apparently organized the musicians. There is kind of a blank spot in there because I was gone. I was gone for three years during the school year. The opera group just became bigger and bigger, though, and I remember that they used to, for a while, present the operas in the old Reno Little Theater building on Sierra Street. I remember attending those. In a small building like that, it was like you had all these people in your own home for the musical presentation.

Because they needed money, several other women and I were asked if we would make cookies and things and sell them at the intermission so that the group could make some money for their expenditures. I was requested to make whiskey balls, and sold those for 25 cents apiece at the intermission, which because you knew a lot of the people there, was great fun to go around and sell them.

Those programs were well supported by the town, as evidenced by the fact that they

have grown into large, successful...although financially they are in dire straits like what every other similar kind of group is going through now. Reno Phil, I know, is having financial problems.

Interesting to see, when you think about it, the Reno Little Theater...my brother came to live with me here after World War II. He went through college in California and then he moved up here. He is big on drama, theater, and all that. He got involved in Reno Little Theater and met his wife there. She passed away a year or so ago, and then he also did a couple months ago.

Reno Little Theater is big, and now look at the number of little theater groups here in Reno. I don't know how many there are, but I would bet at least ten. I read in the newspaper about them all the time. I've not been to the new building, but there is a new building that Reno Little Theater has built someplace. I supported that for many years, but then when my brother and his wife were older and dropped out. That was not my passion. I just used to go.

Eve Loomis is a friend that I met when I became a docent at the art museum. After I retired I started going to several organizations that had interested me for some time. When I was working, I was married then and still am married. It was after I retired that I became more active with the Nevada art group. I always supported them and paid dues forever, but I wanted to become a docent and learn about how they handled that.

I went to that and met two nice friends. Eve Loomis was a drama teacher and English teacher for her whole life (she's ninety-two now), at Sparks High School. My other friend, Charle Varble, again, is a wife of a professor at the university. The three of us were docents. I started when the museum was up on Court Street in that old building, and then followed

it down to Liberty Street. I was a docent for about five years.

I really enjoyed that, but then a different group of people came in who thought docents were not really important, despite the fact that docents were the only ones doing anything with the public. So I quit after five years, and I did miss seeing the new people that I met. That was always interesting. Every year during those times they had a new director, and so it was a hard time until just the last while. They have managed to keep this director.

My husband and I both support it. We go to the various activities and take my daughter and her husband. That was a very enjoyable part of my life. I saw every big change then. I go to see that now and enjoy it, and eat in there with a luncheon group.

Do you remember, at this initial meeting that you were at with the Puffers and with your two friends, what their idea was and who would be doing what?

I think that June was very concerned. Both of them were very concerned about promoting music in Reno because they were both musicians. I know Annette had a couple of kids, and her oldest son was a very serious pianist. June didn't have any children, but she had come from Colorado and she played in a large orchestra there. She played an instrument in this large orchestra, and so she was interested in promoting that sort of thing for Reno.

I just attended when I was in town. I attended everything then and sold cookies and whiskey balls. I know Annette and June were very serious about it, because they spent a lot of time promoting it. Of course, I didn't ever ask about the financial aspect because it wasn't any of my business.

Then June died and Annette's husband, who was an attorney, got an appointment as

a federal judge in California, so they moved away. The opera group was large enough to continue. I think it's important that they have the recognition that they instigated it in the first place, which is contrary to what I read in the paper occasionally.

Can you describe the quality of the productions early on?

Well, one I remember was in the Reno Little Theater building. The audience is very close to the stage because it was a very small building. The opera was *La Bohème*, and I remember the feeling, especially as it built toward the end, where Mimi dies, that there was such a heavy—appropriately so—atmosphere and response. It was quite intimate because the music really is powerful and seemed pretty overwhelming for that size building. That really impressed me, because it was when I came back the first summer after they started it.

The rest of the things must have gone through the winter, as they do here, because I don't remember. That first one was really powerful in a room about the size of my house and up close. I went to so many plays there later with my brother and sister-in-law, who were involved with that little theater group.

It was interesting to me, it surprised me later, that a couple of the other women that I knew, one I met on the street...asked me if I could get her into this group. I wasn't in it, really, as such. I just said, "Well, call so-and-so," which she did and she got involved in that. The other had asked me, too, if I could introduce her to some of the people. So there was some recognition for me, even though I had nothing to do with it. I was friends with these other two women. I didn't ever try to build on that because I was gone so much at the time. I was comfortable, early on, selecting

some of the people in the Community Concerts, I did not feel that I was qualified to really have anything to do with the Nevada Opera. I couldn't be in the chorus because I don't sing. I wish I could.

My husband and I supported them for a long time. I can't remember why we stopped. It seemed to me to be the same old thing. Pretty soon some people aren't so cordial and it's not worth it to put up with it, so I haven't been back. There are lots of people, though, who are involved in that and its struggle. It's just like when I quit going to the art museum as a docent. Early on everyone was friends. Later, it was beginning to break up into a whole different group. That's the way it goes.

How well attended were the opera performances?

I remember that first time they filled up Reno Little theater, which seated a few hundred people. I think that, at first, it was the people who wanted to participate in it that got it going. It has to be that unless there's a whole lot of money, and I never thought there was a lot. My friends were comfortable, but I didn't see them spending a lot of money on it either. It was more of a community effort by musicians who wanted to have that. I don't know whether Ted was able to get any time off from the university. His contracts might have said at that time. We were all friendly.

Two days ago, I received a card in the mail that read "Thank you for joining this year." I called up and this young man answered, and I said, "We have not joined up. How come you're sending this out?"

He said, "Well, we need to find out how many seats and what seats we have to sell."

I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, my husband and I are not going to buy season tickets this year." Last year I was pleased. They had this new woman director in and we liked

her, but we haven't been too red hot about the selections the last couple of years.

You got a letter from the Nevada Opera?

No, no. Opera is long gone. This was the Reno Phil. Opera and I have not been together for how many years? A long time. My main interest to begin with was because my friends were...I was just tagging along on that, supporting it, and it was interesting. I like to see new projects.

Can you tell me about attending the casino shows and what you remember of the shows?

Sure. I *loved* it. I did not approve of gambling, but I loved the music that came. This was part of my love of music in the early days. I remember going to the Riverside and seeing the Mills Brothers. That had a special meaning to me because my mother and father loved the Mills Brothers. My mother and father were very young when my brother and I were born, and so later when we grew up, we were interested in some of the same groups, because some of the musicians would have twenty-year careers. I remember my mom would sing and dance around at home when I was growing up.

When we moved here, I remember there was a local dental meeting. My former husband was part of the dental group, and I remember going the first time to the Riverside. I had to go out and buy a new dress at Magnin's, which was an old store downtown. I bought a great new dress for that and went. I loved the Mills Brothers. They were just wonderful. At the Riverside they had a very nice room and nice background music. It was a fun thing. I don't remember the food part of it. I remember the music part of it.

Another time we went there and Lena Horne was there—a beautiful woman. However, I remember that black people were not allowed to stay at the Riverside. I was just horrified, because growing up in Los Angeles, I didn't know anything about prejudice. There was some prejudice against Mexicans there, especially in San Fernando Valley. There was a mission out there and lots of Mexican...an early mission from the early historic days. I didn't ever remember prejudice against the blacks. There weren't too many in the area that we lived, so coming up here really was a surprise to me.

Over the years we went there, to the Riverside Casino. We had struggled so much when my husband was going through college and dental college, we still didn't have any money to spend, so that was a big occasion in my life to see the Mills brothers. I did see them again later in Sparks. This was the last time I saw them, but I tried to see them when they were in town. We could take advantage of that by that time.

Riverside had that ever-popular spot on the corner and had a musician there. This was after the main room closed. I don't know why that closed. I was sorry when it closed. The fashions changed and there was no longer music in any of the clubs. Early on, all the clubs had music and artists. It must have had something to do with financial issues.

I loved to go to the Riverside and see the women dancers and their great big costumes. They were really fancy, big costumes and dancing. That was very nice. Then, the Riverside gradually went downhill and closed ultimately.

In what ways did it go downhill?

Well, it went downhill financially and they were not able to keep the entertainment

coming in. The people who used to go for entertainment would go someplace else or quit going. I was always disappointed. I wanted to go and see the dancers' costumes because I liked that so much. For a long time there were no musical groups. It amazes me to look in the newspaper now and see in the entertainment section one after another, all the musical groups there are in town and being supported at high prices, in my estimation. There are always people that are interested, I guess.

I remember the Golden. It was a smaller hotel, certainly was not glamorous. It was large. The black entertainers were allowed to stay there. It was very nice, but never was as popular. One day I was at the university—it was in the daytime over lunch—and we became aware that there was a fire downtown, and the Golden Hotel burned. It had been renovated not too long before, and bars had been put on some of the room windows and some people couldn't get out during the fire. I think a couple people were killed.

It never really came back after that, and that made me sad because I always liked to dance. That is why I used to like to go watch the dancers; just for myself, I liked to dance. The Golden Hotel, long after anybody else had a band there, had a band and a few people who would go and dance. That part closed before the fire. Harrah's came in. It was the first new, big casino, and that changed downtown back to more gambling.

Was that the only change, that they brought more gambling downtown, or did it shift things in other ways?

Well, the only retail stores were downtown. Penney's, Sears, and Herz were downtown. One thing about Herz, out in front of Herz jewelry store there was a giant clock on the

sidewalk, similar to the one that they have in New York in the big hotel. It was on the sidewalk and that was downtown for decades until they moved. It was a big historic point in Reno and stayed there until they moved. Herz was downtown forever. They later moved to another spot downtown. They were up across from where Harrah's is now, on the west side of the street. That was a long time ago.

Because I disapproved of gambling and my friends didn't gamble, I don't know just how that changed. Grey Reid's Department Store was downtown, and we heard from other people that it moved later, to several places. Then there were some other stores that moved to more desirable areas, and gradually it changed. Now it's kind of sad to see so many empty stores and spaces.

We have lived here, way out in the "country." Now we're not so far out (two miles). We've been here since 1983, almost thirty years. We were "out in the country" early on. If I had a meeting or entertained, people were always late, because it was "so far out in the country." It is nice. We like it here.

What do you remember about the Reno Philharmonic's early performances?

Well, it developed from Gregory Stone's efforts. I remember that he struggled hard for a couple of years, but I think that must have been during the time that I was gone. I wasn't involved in any way except going to the concerts. He didn't have the best reputation amongst some of the musicians that I knew, but he struggled hard.

Then a new young man came in, a tall young man with big hair. I'm sure there are pictures of him in the history files. He worked very hard to get things going and he really built it up over a period of years. He worked hard. When I say years, it was more than two

or three years. He worked a longer time and was certainly instrumental in helping to build it, and then he left. That wasn't too long ago. I don't know how long he was here, poor man.

What sort of a reputation did Gregory Stone have?

It was not too good. I don't want to be unfair to him, when I was not on the spot. I just remember people saying they didn't think the performances were that good. There were not many musicians involved in it. The number thirty comes to mind, but that is a pretty small group compared to what they have now. Of course, now it's been built up so beautifully. I give credit to the young fellow. I believe he lived here in Reno when he was struggling so hard, but he moved to Carson City and I see his name occasionally in Carson activities. I think he was the first conductor after Gregory, but I was gone most of the time for three years. Reno became pretty big, as it developed.... a big difference from that time.

I remember when I mentioned to a woman in Los Angeles that I was moving to Reno, she said she had grown up in Reno and she thought it was heaven on earth. She would go on and on telling me how wonderful it was. This woman was probably sixty at that time, and I was young. When I got here, I was surprised to see it wasn't what she remembered, mostly because of the gambling. Growing up, she wouldn't have had the same contact. That has remained; the same anti-gambling feelings have remained with me.

Happily, my family was never bitten by any of that. When my son was in college, he told me later, he used to go down and play twenty-one when he needed some money, and he would win some money. It wasn't part of our life, though, not my daughter's—nor either of my husbands.

I was divorced, and that is when I decided I was going to continue school. I figured if I was going to work, I was going to make as much money as I could, and so I got my bachelor's and got my master's. By that time, I was especially interested in counseling psychology. I was long single by that time. I was happy to be able to pursue that. By that time, my daughter was just married. My son was in med school. I have some different parts of my life that are separated from each other in terms of memories. It's bound to happen when you get older. I've been lucky and I worked hard.

Can you tell me more about your friend Eve Loomis and what she has done for the community?

She has always been passionate about the theater. I remember when I first met her as a docent, she would talk about the university presentations and the theater there. She was a good friend of the professors there, so she knew a lot about what was going on in Reno. I guess it was when she still was teaching at high school, she used to write plays. I think she had her kids presenting those plays.

My encounter with her in terms of those plays, she retired. All three of us were retired. This is not the three musical women; this is the three art women. We had this docent connection. Eve started writing plays for kids. She had been for some time. My daughter was working at the Wilbur D. May Museum by that time, and so Eve would start talking to my daughter about the plays. My daughter asked if Eve would present some plays up there. The museum was happy to have people come in. I would hear the actors talking about all the rehearsals, but I wasn't interested.

I went to their presentations. For a lot of the presentations that Eve would have there

at Rancho San Rafael, the same actors in the group would go to the schools and present for the elementary schools for kids. Eve did that for a long time, and she had a group of people—her active theater adults—from the university and from her high school days, and some who were collected at Rancho San Rafael.

This third person, Charle, who is our friend, is the wife of the psychologist that I met up at UNR. Eve had written a play with a part for Charle. Her husband taught there. He just retired a couple of years ago. He was also in the psychological services at the university forever. Charlie was the docent, and Eve had written many plays for children. Charlie, for some reason, wasn't able to be in it, and so Eve asked me if I would do it. So I said, "Sure." The whole thing was forming and they needed somebody. I said, "Okay." The costume for Charlie was small, and I was small. I got involved in that, but I got tired of rehearsing. They just rehearsed and rehearsed. Jiminy, I'd rather be weeding someplace. [laughs]

Eve continued to do that for a long time, and she continued with her group. I run into some of those people that I met through that group, sometimes in the store or on some occasion. One of the women retired a few years ago. She was an English professor there for a long time, I had her in a class; she must be 110 by now. There was a group of people who wanted to be in plays. They would be in these kiddie plays, but they would be in plays at the university too. The public would be in those too.

Eve just loved working with children. In high school, of course, they were older, but she is so good in relating to them. Charlie's husband retired and they just come to town occasionally to see their grandchildren, but they don't live here anymore so no more plays.

Eve still is a docent. She has shrunk. She is tiny, she wears a lot of makeup, she has a

permanent, she has a great sense of humor, and she has a beautiful convertible that she drives. She has had that for probably five years, I would guess. I saw her just recently. She goes to the museum quite a bit. We get together for lunch because we're friends away from the museum, and she knows my husband, Tom.

Just recently she was telling us about an exhibit that she was working with for her children. She would sit down on the floor. I'm assuming she must sit on a chair now, but she would sit and gather the kids around her; they loved it and she loved it. It was always theater for her. Her presentation was just great for the kids. It was not my style at all. It was more Charlie's style. That held the two of them together, but I wasn't interested.

Eve just hangs in there and she is really a dedicated, friendly person. She has a granddaughter who has gone through the loss of two kidneys and several kidney implants and has several-times-a-week dialysis. Eve has supported this granddaughter, who, by the way, is married and very young. Young to me is anybody under fifty years old. [laughs] This gal is in her mid thirties. Eve has devoted so much of her life taking her granddaughter to the doctor, and doing things for her. It is just wonderful.

The mother of the girl, who is Eve's daughter, is very close, but I think that Eve's daughter works. If you plan something, sometimes Eve will say, "I can't do that. I have to take Millie to the hospital." She has done that for a long time—years and years. She is such a fun person, Eve is, and smart. She's winding down, as are all of us. She is such a nice person to know.

I know you wanted to include a little bit about the TV station that was on campus, the predecessor to PBS.

I was impressed with the fact that one of my teachers at the university, Professor Donald Potter, talked in class on numerous occasions about starting up and working with a TV station. Professor Potter was the audiovisual person in the education department, and so interested in the technology—the whole photo area of the world and all of that. He would talk in class about some of the work that he was doing, apparently on a volunteer basis, because I couldn't see any other formal group of people. Apparently he had some friends. He couldn't have been doing it all by himself.

He talked about it, and pretty soon there was a TV station on the university campus, supported by the university. I was no longer in his class by that time, and it went on for some time. I don't know exactly how many years, but off of the top of my head, it was for a couple of years or longer. I really don't know how to judge that because I didn't know anybody else who was involved.

Pretty soon I became aware that it was no longer the university station. It had been sponsored by the university, was on the university campus, (and of course still is), but it has been in several different locations along the way. I didn't have any connection with Professor Potter, who moved on then to some other university, except that I met his wife socially a number of times, but she was not really a friend. I didn't know where he went or they went subsequently. I feel that, for whatever reason, in one way or another, that he has not received—at least I've not heard—proper credit for his early working.

Now, when the local Public Broadcasting station is saying, "This is our something, X, anniversary..." Well, they were not involved early on, and I don't care. Even the university, as such, is getting credit. It's now like, we're here, this is our anniversary, and we did it all.

I do resent that the same way that I resent that the early starters in opera were not getting the credit. To start something like that is a lot of work.

I remember some of the people who were in that first TV group. Betty Stoddard, for one. She was sponsored by one of the clubs. She was on TV for a long time. There was pretty sparse TV for a long time, and then later the three main stations that are the main ones now.

Interestingly enough, there was a character at that time called Cactus Tom, and he would go about town. He was on the radio and he was on TV. He was a big cowboy and large man. He wore cowboy clothes, a big cowboy hat, and he was an important person around town. My son happened to be in the same grade level as Cactus Tom's son and so we paid more attention to him because his son would be on TV occasionally. We paid attention more than we might have another cowboy because of my son's knowing him. Then, as time went on, Cactus gathered his family and moved on.

I don't know if it was at the same time that the networks took over, or what that time frame was, but recently listening to a financial program I heard the name of Cactus Tom's son, coming from offices in New York City. I thought that was interesting. They made it big. This is still on TV, the son, and I assume Cactus Tom is gone from this earth. He was older than I. Funny to see when these things crop up, though.

Are there any last-minute thoughts you would like to include?

After I went away to school in Arizona for my PhD, and I came back, my life did change. By that time I had been single for sixteen or seventeen years, and I became

involved with another group of academic people, just through friendship with some other wives who I saw on different occasions. Through them, I met my present husband of thirty-four years. I met him as a professor at the university—a physics professor, and a senior researcher at DRI. So there were some changes in my life. It was just another section of the same early interest. I don't know how that works out with other people, but I've been pleased. It's worked well for me. For thirty-four years, thirty-five soon, I've been married to Tom Hoffer, a physics professor. It's a great life!

DONNA HOWELL

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Donna Howell: I was born in suburban Chicago and moved to Des Moines quite young. I was raised in Des Moines. I married young, and moved to Minneapolis-St. Paul. We moved around a lot in the first few years of being married—to Alaska, Quebec, Canada, upstate New York, Nebraska, back to Iowa, and then to the Missouri/St. Louis area. We then moved here. We stayed in Reno for twenty years. We left for nine years and went back to St. Louis. We then moved back here for the last ten years.

What took you all over the country?

Well, I was following my husband. [laughs] His work. That was back in the days when companies transferred people all the time. They could afford to do that, people were willing to do that, and the women were willing to tag along. He was a technical representative for his company, which was attached to the

Air Force. That is what took us to Alaska, Quebec, and various other places.

Can you tell me about your parents?

My parents were Ralph and Rose Dow. They were Minnesota people and moved to Des Moines, Iowa, where I was raised. That is where they are buried. My mother was a housewife and my dad was in sales. He had a musical/theatrical kind of background. A part of his family owned one of those huge theaters in the Chicago area. We have recently discovered this through the genealogy we have been doing.

I'm not sure where I developed my love of theater, but they got me a piano when I was quite young and made sure I learned to play and read music. It just went from there.

Was your dad acting in theater?

He did some plays just in high school, I think. I do have a shirttail cousin on the other side of the family who is very active in dinner

theater in the Washington, D.C. area right now. There's just those of us who went a little rogue, I guess. [laughs]

Can you tell me about the schools that you went to?

They were just your typical Midwestern grade school, junior high school, and high school. It wasn't called middle school then. I started acting and doing theater work in high school when I was fifteen. I did everything. I was acting. The very first production I ever acted in was *Our Town*. Doesn't everyone start in that? [laughs] I learned to paint sets and how to do makeup in the days of greasepaint.

It went on from there. I then started my operating room technician training, but at the same time I was still trying to be active in community theater. I did some things with Des Moines Community Theater and another one—the name escapes me.

I got married and moved, but I resumed doing community theater in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and in Omaha—wherever I could through the years. I really got back into the theater in Reno Little Theater when we landed here in 1971.

Can you tell me about your job during that time, aside from theater?

Yes, I was an operating room technician in Minneapolis, St. Paul, New York, and in Omaha. When I was in Alaska, I didn't work. When I was in Quebec, I didn't work. I worked at a hospital in Syracuse. I was raising three children and working. [laughs] A lot of multitasking, as women know so well how to do.

What does being an operating room technician entail?

You assist in surgery, set up the room, set up the instruments, gather the stuff, set it up, open up all the sterile packs, and prepare the room for whatever surgery is coming and whatever doctor is coming in. Many doctors had their own packets of stuff that you could use. You would set it all up, get yourself gowned, and then prepare to have the doctors come in and gown them. You would then drape the patient. Depending on the surgery, you would be everything from up to your elbows, literally, to being a table or even two tables back (if it was a big major open-heart surgery with bypass machines). You basically just assisted in surgery. I loved doing it. I don't know why I loved doing it, but I did. [laughs]

How difficult was it to find local theater groups to work with?

In some places, they were virtually nonexistent. We tried to establish.... We actually put on *Barefoot in the Park* at the small nuclear missile site base up in northern Quebec, Canada. It was one of those situations where we did it with regular clothes and with a drape in the cafeteria. There was nothing. Syracuse was a little easier. In Omaha/Council Bluffs, there was just one that I knew of called Chanticleers. It just depended on where I was. Some places were pretty. In Fairbanks, if you weren't a saloon dancer or go-go girl...this was back. It was pretty primitive there in 1966.

Was it during the sixties that you were traveling around?

Yes, the sixties. Was married in 1959, so [we moved for] the next twelve or so years. We came to Reno in 1971, I believe.

Did you have any expectations of Reno before you arrived?

I was a little girl from the Midwest, and I had never been out of Minnesota or Illinois. I just hadn't. When I went to Fairbanks, it was like I fell off the end of the Earth. [laughs] I always believed [you should] be interested in where you are, see everything you can see, and take advantage of it because you don't know how long you will be there. Then, go on to the next place. I was looking forward.

We weren't happy where we were in St. Louis. My husband had been with the same company. He was with Western Union for forty-some-odd years. He was in the department that was attached to the military for a number of years. A lot of people don't even know or care that Western Union was the first business that put up satellites for communications. They were everywhere and everything for a long time. Now, they're basically just a name.

When the opportunity...it was quite a promotion for him. The building, is on the corner of Mill and McCarran—that rambling one-story beige building with the huge parking lot and the big weeping willow trees. That is where Western Union had one of three centers in the nation. The headquarters was in St. Louis and there was one in New Jersey. He came out here: so that is why we came here, and we stayed here for twenty years. We wanted to give our girls some roots, so we just fought to stay here. The company then started closing the centers. The only one left was in St. Louis, so we went there.

What type of cultural activities, if any, did you hope to find in Reno?

I hoped to find a community theater. I wasn't active in community theater the first time. I've lived in St. Louis twice. The first time it just didn't work out. We were only there about nine or ten months. It just didn't

work out for me to even try to locate anything. I was hoping there was that. My girls...one was taking guitar, one was taking dance, one was taking...that kind of thing. I hoped that I could find those things, but I didn't know. I was just kind of excited to get out of where we were and go West again.

I was very pleased to find Reno Little Theater. They were very welcoming and had their own theater—that building downtown on Sierra Street now where the freeway just about goes through. I was delighted to find that.

After being involved with it for a year or two, we duped my husband into being in a production. [laughs] The director at the time, Blythe Bulmer, who is a big name in the city both in the arts and in Reno Little Theater...I think she was a teacher at Reno High School. She was a wonderful lady and had a wicked sense of humor. She pushed me into a pool when I was in an evening gown at somebody's house party one time. [laughs] We conned my husband into being in a production. Once he was, he was bitten, and he proceeded from there. I was delighted to find that group.

How did you initially become involved in Reno Little Theater?

I just read something in the paper about them having cold auditions, where you just walk in cold and read from the script. I got cast in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and went from there. Dr. David Hettich, from UNR, became a very good friend. He was the mover and shaker behind Reno Little Theater for most of the almost twenty years that we were involved. Like I said, I got welcomed with open arms. I was willing to do anything from box office ushering, painting sets, making costumes, to being on stage. My girls were in a few of the youth productions, and played

the children of Abigail and John Adams in one production. Over the years, I became the box office manager and head of volunteers and getting ushers. Like I said, you just pitch in. Potato salad for seventy-five for a dinner—that kind of thing. It was just this cadre of people. There is always a core of people in most groups, but in theater... then you have people on the outside.

It is still true in the theater part of it—I'm not sure—not true in the opera, that Reno being as transient a community as it is, and maybe it was even more so.... There were a lot of very talented people that would come in and do maybe a production or two, then they move on. They would move out of town. Sometimes there were people coming in and just helping with productions backstage, or just sitting around with pizza or beer and talking about theater and asking what do you like to do.

A somewhat famous individual (who was not famous at the time), that came and participate in a couple of productions was a young producer named Jim Wilson, but his friend was Kevin Costner. [laughs]

Was Kevin Costner involved in Reno Little Theater?

Not really. Jim was from Truckee, so Kevin would be up there. A couple of three times they just came down, walked in, and asked, "How's it going? What are you doing? What are you putting on?" They would just hang and talk theater. That was cool.

No one had any idea who Kevin Costner was at that time?

Not really. If he was famous, it wasn't a big deal. I couldn't really think back and tell you where he was in his career in early seventies,

but theater people tend to gravitate to theater people. Artsy people find artsy people. They just wandered in one time.

"Hi, I'm Jim."

"Hi, I'm Kevin."

"Hi, Kevin." [laughs]

Do you remember the names of the core people at Reno Little Theater?

There was George and Heppie Randolph. Unfortunately, Heppie has just passed away recently. Diana Carter, Blythe Bulmer, David Hettich, and Bill and Eleanor McCowan. Unfortunately, both of them...he just passed away a couple of weeks ago. Jim Cashell, who is the mayor's brother. It has been so many years now. There was Ed Semenza, who was one of the founding fathers, along with Blythe Bulmer, the founding mother. He wasn't much a part of it at the point that we were there. Madge Tillim kind of came and went. If I were to look at a program, I would see the names and say, "Oh, yes."

Can you describe the building on Sierra and Seventh?

There was a lovely little lobby with a couple of chandeliers. We did go through a major lobby renovation sometime in the 1980s. There was a box office and two doors into the theater. It was a typical slant, and it sat about 220 to 240 people. It was a typical proscenium arch, drape, and small backstage. We did have a workshop on the back, with a tall door. We could make good, tall sets back there.

Downstairs there was a green room area where we could gather. They served wine and soda at intermissions. There was an area that they turned into a theater in the round, as it were. Sometimes you had to completely clean

the thing out—the sets and the props— in order to be able to set it up to do that. There were some dressing rooms. It was an actual honest-to-god theater.

It was an old building. Back in the day it had been a Masonic Lodge or somebody's hall. It was on a fifty-year lease from the city. We owned the building, but not the land. We always thought that someday the Sands or one of the casinos was going to want this land for a parking lot. The fifty-year lease came due. I was on the board at the time. We had an attorney who redid the whole thing for another fifty-year lease. I remember some of the older generation at that time just laughing and saying, "Oh, my word, who would have ever thought, back in 1933 or 1934, when we did this, that we would ever have gotten to the end of this fifty-year lease?"

It was renegotiated pretty much along the same lines. Sometimes when you get lawyers involved, the paperwork is a foot and a half thick. We still worried, that somewhere along the line, if they really wanted it, they would figure out how to get it, and they did. They paid them... I heard a figure of \$150,000, but I don't know if that's correct. What can you do with that? When you want to rebuild a theater, what can you do with that? That doesn't do much.

So it was sold and was torn down. I almost won't look at it because I don't want to see what is there. Reno Little Theater has struggled. All the arts struggle almost all the time, no matter what. Of course in this economy it has just been beyond dreadful. They are hanging in there and doing their thing. They built that small building on Wells, which is not finished, by any means. I don't know if they even plan to have a regular proscenium-arch theater. In the meantime, they do most of the productions, at Hug High School.

It was a wonderful time in our life, and we enjoyed it. Our kids became part of it—they

helped usher, helped paint sets, and pretty much knew everybody that was there.

Did your children want to get involved?

I never believed in pushing kids into something they didn't want to do. Sometimes I would say, "Well, sometimes you don't know what you like unless you try it. If you try it once or twice and you find it's not for you, then you quit doing it. But if you would like to, this is what is available. They are looking for a girl of this age to do this." One of them went on to do some things in high school, and my daughter's oldest son did some things with Reno Little Theater.

Which productions were your children involved with?

I know they were in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and they were in *The Diaries*...it is based on the letters that John and Abigail Adams wrote to each other. It is funny because there was a man that joined the Nevada Opera three operas ago and we got to talking. It turns out that he was with our oldest daughter in one of the plays when he was fifteen at Reno Little Theater. They didn't do a lot of children's productions. There was a certain time frame in there, pretty much three or four of them... when they did do children's productions, the girls were either in it or part of it.

It is just being part of that group.... It is one of those things about theater and opera, where you get together, you do all this rehearsal, and it's very intense. Everybody does their thing, and it is almost like this little family cluster forms. You have the big party at the end and then everybody goes their separate ways. Sometimes young people, particularly, have depression that sets in for a few days or a week. They wonder, "Where

did everybody go? Where am I supposed to go Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday nights for rehearsals? What am I supposed to do with my time?" It is so intense and then—boom!—it is done.

How would you describe the quality of the productions at Reno Little Theater?

Some of them are quite good and some of them weren't as good as you would maybe like them to be. It depended on if you had some of your more experienced actors in the production or if you had a good solid director. They did do some real quality work, but in all honesty, you would have to say that not every production was a Triple-A production. They did do a lot of quality work, though.

They didn't do as many musicals as I would like to have seen or as the public would have liked them to have done. It's difficult, though, and it takes somebody special to direct a musical. If you don't have that person in your group or you don't have musicians in your group...Nobody was paid, and a lot of the people in this community that were middle-grade or professional-grade musicians were working in the shows around town, so they were never available in the evenings. We did *Little Night Music*, and that was just a roaring success. It was phenomenal. Like I said, though, we didn't do many musicals.

What are the challenges of a community-based theater that draws its performers from within the community?

The challenges. Well, money. [laughs] I know that sounds like an old song, but it's true. Ticket sales, advertising, in your program, and donations—that is about the only place you can...you can have a couple

of fundraisers a year, but it always will come down to money. Money is a big problem.

You always get in any group, and in arts groups particularly, people with a little bigger egos, shall we say, than maybe some other places. Sometimes there would be people that wouldn't agree with the selection of plays for the season, the director, or who was chosen in the lead roles. "Well, I'm going to start my own theater group." There always were a certain amount of factions that were going to start their own theater group, and some would. More power to them. The community only benefits from having more than one. Unfortunately, none of them prevailed for any length of time. Sometimes it is just personalities.

Money isn't everything, but it is a lot. You can have better equipment—better everything—and maybe you can even pay a stipend to someone to come in and direct or do a musical...if you don't have those funds, then you are limited. I would just basically it is money and just personalities sometimes. We did have a couple issues with people that came in and were just going to change everything—throw out this, throw out people.... You would just about get a revolution on your hands. Sometimes you get somebody who comes in and they are wonderful. We had one gentleman in particular that came in, and he was fabulous. He had done this and he had done that. About halfway through the production, not only was his leading lady drunk all the time, but he was so stoned out that he couldn't function. So there ya go. We used to say sometimes that if they are so good, what are they doing here? [laughs] Why aren't they in New York or Chicago—wherever there are bigger fish to fry?

We did have over the years at least one case of embezzlement. You talk about money being an issue—there was a time when it was really an issue.

Is community theater ever looked down upon by performers who are maybe more successful?

If they were a little more successful, I don't think they did, because they probably came up through the ranks somewhere. Most people start out in high school or college productions and work their way up. There may have been some people asking, "Well, if he's so doggone good, why is he here and not in New York?" I don't think it really came from someone that had had experience and was now living here for whatever reason and working in the theater. I didn't find that so much, no. Sometimes I would choose to just turn a blind eye to things. I can't understand how people can't get along when they are doing something that is volunteer and they want to be there. You get along with everybody; otherwise, go home.

How many people would be involved at any given time with Reno Little Theater?

Well, judging by how many people we could cram into our house, when we lived here before, for a party afterward...the person who puts the program together, the person who did lights, who did sound, who was stage manager—you can have anything from twenty to thirty or forty people involved in a production. The core of it probably would come down to between twenty and thirty people that kept the place running.

What did being a board member of Reno Little Theater entail in terms of your responsibilities?

You had your meetings and just sitting down and discussing things. There was a play reading committee. There were different committees. You would get together with all of the committee members and the other board

members and discuss the upcoming season. We would discuss where is the theater right now, how are we doing financially, whether we have a list to pick from for directors for the next season, and just go over the business end of it.

It is important to have people on the board that have a love of the arts. They don't have to be a performer per se, but they have to have some knowledge, understanding, and a love of the arts, as well as some business sense. If you don't marry the two, you've got a mess. When a director picks a play and says, "We have to have blue velvet curtains over here. We have to have this over there. What's our problem? Can't we spend \$500 or \$1,000 on this?" They will go ahead and do it, unless there is somebody there that says, "Okay, can we sharpen the pencil just a little bit more? This is our budget for this production and somehow we're going to have to stay within that."

It was like getting your eggs in a basket, sitting down, and just talking about all the different things. How's the building? What needs to be done? Do we have to be compliant for wheelchair access? How is the wiring holding up in the lighting booth? Is the physical plan of the building itself going to stand up for another ten years? We discussed all those kinds of things—addressing any problems. If someone had a real problem with someone else or if someone felt that a director had been rude to the performers at some point...just dealing with the daily ins and outs. That was primarily it.

Do you remember what sort of yearly budget Reno Little Theater had?

I would tell you if I would remember, but I don't. It never would have been more than a few thousand for any given production. There

just wasn't more than that. This is back in the days when tickets were six to twelve bucks, so it's not like you made a fortune.

Besides ticket sales, did the theater have other sources of revenue?

Donations and the occasional fundraisers. Sometimes we'd go through an old...if we had a storage unit that we hadn't used anything from, we would figure out what was in there and have a theater garage sale. Anything fundraisers, ticket sales, and grants. Sometimes you were given grants. You would write for a grant and get a certain amount from the state or from the Feds.

Moya Lear was very generous with the theater, but when she was gone, that was the end of it. The Dandinis—Countess Dandini—were generous to the arts. When they passed, that was it. It has been the same way with the Opera. You have your angels, but sometimes when they pass, their families are not as generous. By the time they split up the family fortune they don't have that interest and all of a sudden the money is gone.

So that was the main source: ticket sales, grants, donations, and fundraisers.

Do any of those fundraisers stand out in your mind?

Spaghetti feeds. We didn't do much in the way of silent auctions. That, I think, is something that has become maybe more popular since our involvement there. We did mostly dinners and that kind of thing.

What kinds of professional backgrounds did the members involved in Reno Little Theater have?

Several that were teachers, either high school level...well, any level, but up to and

including professors at UNR. They came from all backgrounds, from bankers to sales, to medical, to housewives, to casino industry workers of one kind or another. For the most part, they had to be a little bit better educated than some of the populace, only because you have to be erudite. You have to be able to read well to do an audition. You have to be able to understand script and figure out your character and all of that. You have to be able to speak without having four tongue studs. [laughs]

Can't get a word out.

Right, which happened to us in St. Louis with a youth group at a college. I remember the director saying, "You can have the part if you take that tongue stud out."

"Well, I'm not going to take the tongue stud out."

"Well, then, okay. Fine. I'll find someone else for the part, because I'm not going to have you up there mealy-mouthing around with a large tongue stud in your mouth." [laughs] So I would say that most of the people were reasonably well educated and well spoken.

How did the community seem to embrace Reno Little Theater?

We had pretty good attendance. There was many a time we sold out, especially if you did things like Neil Simon, popular stuff, or a musical. The musicals would always sell out. Well, I believe they did really well. It's just that you don't have everyone interested in theater.

Back in that day, I will have to say, there were so many more shows in the community. Every casino had a show. If you had somebody come to town, unless they were really into community theater, you didn't take them to community theater. You took them to

a show at the casino. It was something we always battled against. It was like the tide, you know. There was just all these shows that took people's attention and their entertainment money. You only have so much money to spend on entertainment. That was always something that was a force in theater life—the shows in the casinos. Pioneer would bring in Broadway shows, just like they do today. The town was much smaller, though, so you were much more limited. Generally, I think the theater was well received by the community in general.

What kind of people made up the audience?

A broad spectrum. You would have high school students come in and teachers. They would bring in a whole group of families, depending on the production. We seemed to have a pretty good group of people, though probably not maybe from the lowest economic strata. It isn't that people in the lower economic strata wouldn't enjoy theater; they just simply can't afford to do it. It was a pretty broad spectrum, I would say.

Do any productions stand out as being especially popular?

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Man, they stood out in the street for that one. George Randolph was Big Daddy, and he was a mighty fine actor. He looks the part. That was a smash success. Any Neil Simon play that you did, and any musical that you did...I spoke of *A Little Night Music*.

Sometimes you would do a really dark drama and it would draw well—really stark stuff. If it was done really well and Jack Neal gave us a good review, then your next performances would have really good sellout. It was always a crapshoot. [laughs] That is why

we would do a lot of the more obscure “avant-gardey” kind of stuff in theater in the round. That was more your experimental, maybe not as popular, stuff. Actors get tired of doing the same thing. They want to stretch. They want to do something different, and that's all well and good. I understand that— that's how they grow in their craft. On the other hand, it is hard to get people to come and see it sometimes. A lot of that, when it was done, it was done down there in theater in the round.

Was there the same amount of rehearsal time for theater in the round?

For the most part, yes. Oftentimes we'd interweave them. We had four main productions, I believe, through the season, from fall until spring or early summer. Sometimes what we would do is squeeze one or two of those in between. Sometimes you were literally rehearsing two places—on the main stage for one and in the basement in the other little theater for something else.

How did you go about selecting the plays?

We had a Play Reading Committee of four or five people, and they would just get a stack every year and pour through them. Then they would meet with the board and discuss. “Well, what do you think this year? Should we open with a Neil Simon? Shall we...”

“Who do we have to direct? Well, she is good at directing...”

Sometimes people who are interested in directing a particular production would submit that to the Play Reading Committee, which would then take it to the board. We would say, “So-and-so has this time frame in their schedule. They would really like to direct this production. What do you think?” If we knew the person or if they have a good

résumé, sometimes we took a chance. If it fit into the plan for that season, then we would put it in the season. That was pretty much the two ways that plays were picked.

Did you have to pay for royalties?

Oh, yes. You always...there are a few things out there that you don't have to pay royalties on, but you always have to pay royalties. We always asked, "Okay, is this going to do well enough to warrant spending this amount of money on the royalties?" We tried very hard to be able to do what we wanted to do, what we thought our audience would want to see, and hope the money was there.

Do you remember plays that have particularly high royalties?

I know from the group that I was with in St. Louis that *Annie* had horrible royalties, but we knew we would make a fortune on it. Well, I say "a fortune." In order to keep this viable for families, the seats were like four dollars for the tickets, because we didn't have the overhead. It was a youth performance group, but everything was done at a community college, so we didn't have to pay for the rental of the theater. It was brand new, and it was beautiful.

A lot of times musicals are high. With *Peter Pan*, you either have no flying or you pay to have people come in from the Foys, who are the original flyers of *Peter Pan*. Their company will send techs in and teach people how to fly those four or five principal people. That's expensive, but there again, we did really well on it.

Was your choice of plays based on any seasonal activities?

With the group in St. Louis, it was definitely. It was a Halloweeny-based production in the fall in October. Then again we did some Christmas-themed production, whether it was *Christmas Carol* or *Babes in Toyland*. It was always something based for the holidays. Then in the spring there was always a big musical. Here, not so much. Once in a while we may have done *A Christmas Carol* at Christmas or the holiday season.

Were there any guidelines for selecting plays?

Reno, for all the gambling and the other things we have going on here, is a conservative community for the most part. It particularly was twenty to thirty years ago. You would have been hard-pressed to have gotten away with doing *Equus*. [laughs] There are always those that are ready to stretch their mind and accept and whatever, but the majority of people were not.

Talk about something that did sell out — *Eat the Snow* or something *Snow*. It was the story of the Donner party. That production was a standing-room-only situation. *Devour the Snow*?

We didn't get too far out. This community is conservative. There again, that is why you have the theater in the round. You could get away with things a little more experimental, maybe a little sharper, with a little more language dealing with homosexuality, or dealing with other things that just made people far more uncomfortable than it would today. There were always a few constraints here and there.

What changes did you see in Reno Little Theater over the years?

Just a flow and shift of people. David Hettich did leave at one point before we moved

on. That was a seismic shockwave to the theater in and of itself. He was really the glue that held things together. I wasn't as involved once I started with *Hello Hollywood* as I had been, because I couldn't be—I was working nights. My husband did a fair amount, even still, during that time. I remember at one time I managed to change my work schedule one night a week and went to rehearsal. I did a play in the middle of all that and wanted to kill myself time-wise. [laughs]

Losing the building was the worst thing. That was just horrendous. I don't even know for sure how Reno Little Theater survived that. We had gone by that time back to St. Louis. I would say probably losing Dr. Hettich and then the sale of the building were the two worst things that ever happened to it.

Were there productions which were particularly memorable or which you particularly enjoyed?

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, which was about Henry David Thoreau. Just the group of people... Judy Cole's husband Elmer, played my husband in that production. *Gaslight* was another one I really enjoyed doing. There were just so many of them.

Every summer we would tell ourselves if we would get cast which was never a given—you had to audition...but for maybe two....“I will usher and do box office and you can do lights.” It always grew somehow until it wound up that many a year we were doing something with all four productions. So, we couldn't stay away. [laughs]

How did you become involved with the Hello Hollywood Hello production?

I went and just put in an application and a résumé on what I had done and on my experience in that field of costuming. About

the time I thought, “I don't think I'm going to hear from them,” I got a call. I went in and I got hired. I started there in April of 1978. I think that is the year it opened. I was hired before it opened. Actually, it didn't open on time. The hotel did in June, but the show... The sets for San Francisco—the San Francisco earthquake scene—were so massive, tall, and so heavy, they were built as if it was for a movie set (in that they didn't have to be moved in a hurry, which they did). The show itself didn't open when it was supposed to. It was about two weeks, or three weeks late in opening. So, they brought in headliners. I got picked to work with them, so I worked with Mac Davis and Joan Rivers. That was fun. They were both fun to work for. I toured Joan, her husband, and Melissa backstage through all the wardrobe and costuming. So that was fun.

Then the show got started, and we were literally working, before the days of unions, eighteen- and twenty-hour days. People were falling asleep on the sets, in their cars, and wherever they could find to catch a few minutes or an hour or two of sleep. It was something else. It sifted down from there, once things got going. There are a ton of stories out of that place, I'll tell you. There are enough to write a book.

What were you hired to do?

Dressing, which consists of wardrobe.... There was about twenty-six or twenty-seven people in wardrobe and a full-time wig person. I think in the beginning, the shoes were repaired there, but then we started sending them out. The day crew of about eight. We did minor repairs and what have you. We just maintained all the costumes, we did all the pre-sets and the fast changes, of which there were a ton. You had a several-page cue sheet of where to be when, and you

learned as you did those positions, primarily the music. "Where are they? I've got to be over stage right. Be right back." Away you would go. That was primarily it.

You had everything from your principal singers and dancers to your various tall nudes. You had your bluebells, which were tall girls that were covered, and you had your pony, which were the smaller nude girls. After a few years, they did go to...they realized, for one thing, they were missing out on a certain segment of customers—kids. They went to covered show every Sunday, so we were madly making bras and things. [laughs] Not that there weren't a lot of bras anyway, because not everyone was topless and even the topless dancers weren't topless all the time. Anyway, there were costumes to be made when they decided to do that.

We had some of the top designers—Pete Minafee and Bill Campbell. Bob Macke even worked on some of it. The wig gal was Renata. She was a designer and did wigs for Cher.

A lot of the stuff arrived in pieces because they were huge. We would get these big round foam lime-green rhinestone-studded pieces and we would ask, "What do you do with that? Is that an arm thing or a head thing? What is it?" [laughs] There was everything—futuristic space, underground monsters, San Francisco stuff, and golden Hollywood with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. There were all these different tableaux. Designers and assistants to designers finally came along and said, "Okay. No, this is actually going to be this part of the sleeve. Then this smaller one goes below the elbow." There was all manner of things that went phooey, wrong, silly, and stupid.

In the ballroom scene, which had gorgeous rust-colored velvet gowns with miles of rhinestone chokers and headpieces, the pheasant feathers originally went out, horizontally. They lacerated the eyeball twice

of two different male dancers that were trying to dance with these girls. These pheasant feathers would whip across their eyes. We had to take all those headpieces apart and redo them with the feathers sticking straight up.

It always amazed me that they made that kind of a mistake. I know working with *Nutcracker*, *Hello Hollywood*, and even the Opera...working with Barbara Land's dancers from UNR it is a different set of rules. They have to be able to kick. They have to be able to move their arms. They have to be able to jump. They have to be able to do all these things, and they need to not have stuff whip off of them or whip the person next to them. It always amazed me that they made that mistake, but there were a lot of things that went on.

Where were the costumes constructed?

Some came from France. I don't remember the company there. Bill Campbell was a major designer with the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Pete Menafee was mainly from New York, so a lot of it was constructed wherever their manufacturing/constructing houses were back east. Some things came pretty pulled together and other things, like the queen's massive cape for space, that had to have thousands of silver mirrors hand-sewn on it. It had these long panels, and there was six of them. So just our crew, before the show opened...even afterward, that is what you were doing—you were putting this together.

That devastating fire in Las Vegas at the MGM.... That show that they were putting in then is still running today. It's now Bally's, but it is called *Jubilee*. Pete Menafee's main assistant, Dawn, was saying at the MGM they were also working on putting that show together when that fire hit. She was one of the ones that was lost in that fire. We doubled efforts trying to do what we could do to help

them down there recoup and redo, so we were working on some things for them as well.

By the time you became involved with the production, how much was in place?

It was very primitive. [laughs] I arrived on the scene at the point where people stopped wearing hardhats backstage. It was in rehearsals, but it was by no means pulled together. It was an amazing process to watch. Don Arden was the director. I would not be the first person to say in public that he was...

He could be a miserable son of a so-and-so. In fact, they had a documentary on Channel 5, and some people who were interviewed in there talked about him. He could be quite vicious, but he was very good at what he did. He got the job done.

It was very early on. A lot of things happened. Sets weren't pushed together at the right time, and water hoses burst and water went all over the stage and the theater and the seats. It just nearly electrocuted the stage manager. That was very early on. This young man that I have known— his family and he were involved in Reno Little Theater—he had been raised on Navy bases around the world, so they are taught from childhood on basic first aid. When Ron O'Neal became literally frozen to two electrical pieces in the middle of the stage, he was the only one that knew to run at full speed and knock him off and loose and not get himself electrocuted. I did what I could do in that, but he was okay. It took some time, because that kind of a jolt is not good.

Was the construction on sets?

It was on everything. They were putting in the seats in the theater itself and getting that finished. There were sets and the costumes. I couldn't speak really for the technical end of

it. I think that was all pulled together because it went up three, four, or five stories, with all the ropes, the cables, and the elevators. I'm assuming that that was all pretty much pulled together.

The costuming didn't get fully put together until even after the show was open. At that time in 1978, the costumes were a million and a half dollars. The theater was four million dollars. That is one of the reasons they don't put those kind of shows on anymore—they simply can't. In today's money, they can't afford that kind of quality. The quality of those costumes.... The American Institute of Costume Design has come out and actually looked at these costumes physically. A few of those costumes are in the Nevada State Museum. They were donated, and Jan Loverin, who is the curator of the Textiles Division...some of those costumes were there. Karen Burns has a lot of them in huge warehouses, and she uses them for different model shoots and productions that she does.

They were made in 1978, so how many years ago is that? A lot of these costumes are still good enough to have them out in front of the public. They were made to last, and they were used for two shows a night, seven nights a week for eleven years. They're amazing—absolutely amazing.

I saw an ad in *Travel* magazine or something for Las Vegas. The ad said, "We're not just casinos." it showed a golf course, with a showgirl in full feathers, with the golf club in her hand. I looked at that and I said, "That's our bra and G." I looked down at the very fine print, and it said "Show girl courtesy of *Jubilee*, Bally's."

"I knew it was one of ours." I could just tell, especially when I worked on it for eleven years. [laughs]

Was that your main job at that point?

Yes, that was a job-job. It was not a volunteer job. It started out seven nights a week, then it went to six. Eventually it went to five, so I could have somewhat of a normal life. It was unionized three or four years into it, so the pay got a little bit better and they couldn't work you like a slave without compensating you for it. [laughs] We didn't work to the beat.

When the show become unionized, were there any changes besides the pay?

No, other than that people didn't feel like they were being used. This is a right-to-work state. Everyone benefits from a union shop, but not everyone joins the union. The pay was a little better. If you had to work overtime or they had to call you in, they had to pay for it. That was only right.

What were the standard show times?

7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., and 10:00 p.m. to midnight. By the time you got done and put everything away, you were usually there another hour. We left usually about one o'clock in the morning.

As the show went along and everybody in the world had seen it fourteen times, the attendance started to drop, which is understandable. We are not Las Vegas, so we don't draw like Las Vegas does for anything. They started bringing in celebrities and changing a few bits and pieces to incorporate the celebrity into the show. We had Suzanne Somers, Carol Channing, Jim Nabors, and the hoochi-coochi Cuban girl—Charo. A lot of these names probably don't even mean that much to you, but they were big names at the time.

There were in-between-act acts, and they would change those out periodically—maybe continue one here then change another

one. That is what they tried to do as far as bolstering attendance was concerned.

Everybody in the show knew that attendance was down but still it came not as a shock when it closed, but a "Doggone it, they gave up on this show." When you consider the one in Las Vegas is still going all these years later because they've changed certain things.... They've maybe changed a complete tableau. They had the sinking of the *Titanic*, and Sampson and Delilah and the crumbling of the temples. Other things that they could change easily, they did. It freshened it up, so people kept coming to see it. There again, it is Vegas. Jubilee is maybe the only old-fashioned topless French-revue-style shows in Vegas anymore. Everything has gone to Cirque du Soleil this, Cirque of that, or Cirque Q. That is not to say they are not entertaining and not good, but you get six or seven of them out there...you can only climb a pole so many ways. [laughs]

What is a French-revue-style show?

That is the topless part. That comes from France in the Moulin Rouge and Folies Bergère back in the day. They still have them. That is where it all originated from when the Can-Can ladies [whispers] didn't wear underwear. That's why it was so popular with all the gentlemen. [laughs] This was the original. I've been there in France in the Moulin Rouge backstage. The reason I have been backstage, which was a real treat and not for the general public, is because a lady who was the star for eight years came from *Hello Hollywood*. She is a dear close friend and she comes to visit. She's in the Bay Area now. Her name is Debra DeCoudreux, Debbie DeCoudreux.

One of the wonderful things that happened with *Hello Hollywood* after it closed is that so

many of the people stayed. In the eleven years of the show being here, they married, they settled, and they went to college. We have an assistant district attorney, CPAs, and realtors who were in the show. Almost all the dance studios in town are owned by people who are ex-*Hello Hollywood* people. They have contributed immensely. Beth McMillan from Artown...they were all part of *Hello Hollywood* at one time.

Who is the assistant district attorney?

I don't know what her married name is. Linda Nordvick was her name in the day. The people that stayed have contributed enormously to this community in all facets, but particularly the arts. That has been great.

Can you tell me about the show's different tableaux.

The opening was a Ginger Roger's old Hollywood— coming down the staircase and all the incredible feathers and singing. Michael Erdley, who owns Tanglewood Studios, was the lead male singer. A number called "Heat Wave"... you look across like this and then think of 135 of them out there.

This picture of the costume shows a large headpiece with many red feathers. The dancer has a beaded bra and a little bit of red rope draped on the bra. It is very sparkly and feathery.

They had feathers on their behinds, which you can't see here. These feathers were called cote feathers. They came from France, and when they broke they were like miniature daggers. Girls were always coming off with big scratches down their arms or scratches on their legs. Over the years those were changed

to just more basic American chicken feathers. [laughs] The quills weren't so sharp when they broke.

The plane would come out in the beginning, with the showgirls coming down the stairs once it stopped. It was all just basically old Hollywood. There was dancing in the dark and the ballerina...the ballet numbers and the beautiful numbers. I have a wonderful story about the big ostrich fan feathers. The show would go into the San Francisco...there was a park scene with these gorgeous long satin, silk, and lace gowns and hats that were three and four feet tall.

The show would then go into the San Francisco earthquake with the saloon scene. The scene featured this gal that I said was a good friend of mine. She passed away. It was a whole saloon scene with honky-tonk music and it was just fun. The earthquake would start, and some of the buildings were geared to collapse. Smoke would go off and the pyrotechnics and fires would start— the whole thing. San Francisco will rise again.

Then the next tableau was space, which started out with the Space Goddess and spacemen coming down from the ceiling in their space outfits. Everybody's dancing, dancing, dancing. There were two hours of dancing and some singing.

The show went into the underground monster scene, where everything came up and explosions would go off. The monster was [demonstrates] and the slave girls are all chained.... [laughs] The Amazon women fighting the monsters.

There was an in-between act. You had an in-between act in between all of this. The shows then went to the circus. Clowns would kick like the Rockettes. The big huge wagons—the Showboat wagon, the Wizard of Oz wagon, the big wagon with the lion tamer's lions.... It just kept rolling along. We used to

say, "So what was the difference between *Hello Hollywood* and a nuclear explosion? Once it got started, you couldn't stop it." [laughs] Either one of them. Even when the horse fell in the water trough, the show went on behind the horse while they were trying to get the horse out. When it started, it didn't stop until it was over.

Can you describe what the MGM theater was like?

It's still there. It is two feet shorter than a football field. The center elevators that drop down, shifted, lowered, came up, and went up...it is so hard to explain it if you haven't ever seen it. It was phenomenal. You could put a good-sized five-bedroom house where those elevators were. It was immense. What they call the flown elevator came down in space and it was the second largest flown elevator after NASA. Mind you, this is late seventies and eighties, so things progressed from there, but it's still amazing even to this day. It was huge.

Stage right, stage left, and the back stage were sizable. It could have always used more room, but because of all the sets. The plane's wings would fold up. It is a three-quarter-sized DC-8. The wings would fold from about half to three-quarters towards the fuselage. That's the only way you could store the thing once it was backstage.

As is typical, no matter that they spent four million dollars on this, not everything was done right. From the wardrobe point of view, you had 135 people in the cast, and nearly every person had between seven and nine costumes costume changes. Now, some might have more, some might have less, but on the average, each performer had between seven and nine costumes. They had these narrow little dressing rooms. If the girls were

sitting there and they were pushed back a little bit, you could hardly get past them.

These girls are all five-foot-ten and over, and they had over hang at their stations that they kept banging their knees on. Their knees were constantly bruised from banging this sucker. When you tried talking to someone about sawing that out of there, they had a fit. "Well, that is the way it was designed." Well, I don't care. It doesn't work. They're beating themselves half to death with those.

The performers were given about a four-foot-wide area of closet, with a shelf that was maybe a foot high for hats that were three- and four-feet high. There was not even a fourth of the space that was needed to put the costumes. They constructed a costume room on stage right that was the size of a large bathroom to do all your quick changes for sixty or seventy people at the same time. That wasn't going to work.

We had to improvise. We had a ton of rolling racks and we also had flown racks that the guys in the basement—the welders—built. We pushed a button and the whole thing came down. It was just a framework with big U-hooks, to hang these big, huge costumes on, some of which weighed twenty and twenty-five pounds. Sheets were thrown over them so that we could flip them up and bring them down to protect them from dust when they weren't being used. Those were in three or four different areas backstage because they just simply didn't...I don't know what they were thinking. That part of it was just a mess.

It is just cavernous, it is so huge. Then there are two big round stages on stage left, and stage right toward the front, with their own separate curtains. They went in circles or stood still. The whole theater so far up and so far down, at least three floors down or more, including a cavernous subterranean basement that I had to go down into one

time. It was so creepy, I just couldn't get out of there fast enough. There was green slime and water on the walls. You want to know what's underneath the old MGM, I can tell you. [laughs] It is not being used to even an eighth of its potential right now. Heaven only knows what it would take to bring the machinery itself back to life and what is usable and what is not. It's an amazing place. I've often thought they should actually sell tickets and tour people back through there. They, to my knowledge, never did, though.

What would you have to do to get ready for the show?

I would arrive generally a half an hour before. If you knew you had something special you had to do, you would just tell Maria, the manager at night, "Maria, I really need to come in half an hour to get this done." If you had something really major, like the entertainers contracts were renewed every six months, so every...

When somebody wanted to leave or was asked to leave, you just rotated the costumes. There might be five on a contract, ten, or twenty on a contract. We were phenomenally busy then because you had to refit these new people into what you had. The major renovations you would give to the day crew and they would work on it. We did a lot of, in our spare time, repairing small tears and rips, or broken jewelry. There was a lot of jewelry work. I spent a lot of time working on space wigs at one time. I actually was fortunate enough to design a couple of replacement pieces for principal singers. We were busy. We were kept busy from the time we walked in the door until the time we left.

What did the day crew do?

They just did repairs. There were repair racks. We wrote a note out saying whose it was and what it needed doing, and put it on the repair rack. They would work on it during the day. We would pick it up when we came and made sure it was done and fitted before the show started. Then we would go to work on getting the pre-sets ready.

What would that entail?

It is for the quick changes. The girls who come roaring off of one dance and as they are roaring off, you would have your rolling racks with what you needed. We would usually put sheets out on the floor. They would be peeling stuff off as they would come—dropping it. We would be helping get them in new costumes, and off they'd go. Sometimes you would have a minute.

Now with the opera performers will say, "I have a real quick change in Act 3, Scene 1."

I say, "Okay." I would discuss maybe with the stage manager what we you have to do. Maybe this person has done it before.

They would say, "I have time to go back to my dressing room."

"You have time to go back to your dressing room? Okay. Then that is not really a quick change." I would say to them, "Do you need to be changed backstage?"

"Oh, no, I have time to go back to my dressing room."

"Oh, okay. There is a change."

Sometimes they would say, "I have pre-set backstage."

"Okay. Any idea? Have you done this before?"

"Well, it is pretty quick."

Okay, so we time it. We do a rehearsal or two in advance and you time it. "They've got four minutes." For somebody who is experienced at doing this, four minutes is an

eternity. If it is a minute and less, and you have to change a shirt, pants, vest, coat, hat, and shoes, then you need to have two people—one peeling clothes off and one putting clothes on. [laughs] Otherwise, you're not going to get it done. If it is anything more than a minute, it is usually not a big concern.

Would the dancers be wearing underwear or tights throughout the entire show?

Yes, they have what you would call their personal G-string? They also wore flesh-colored fishnets. Those they wore the entire time. Generally speaking, with the exception of only a few numbers, would they actually wear tights over that—yellow tights, or white tights, or whatever. A couple performers that did ballet would have regular tights and ballet shoes. They always wore those two things. That was their personal undergarment, as it were.

We were kept constantly busy repairing those fishnets, which is a process in its own right. We had a board that you fit them over, and it's kind of almost like crocheting. We did it with tiny little thread, though, and made these little tiny squares. You could have a blowout because sometimes they would catch something on a hook and just [demonstrates]. If you had time enough to work on it, you could reconstruct it.

Can you tell me the feather story?

I think it's a wonderful story, and anybody I've ever told it to just loves it. There was the MGM lion, and he was always featured at the very top of the calliope in the *Circus*. In the whole finale of the show, everybody turns and presents to the lion, and the music [demonstrates]...the spotlight hits the lion, and there you are. Two things about this lion:

one is that he didn't like being up there doing that, so whenever it came to that, he would turn around, raise his leg and his tail and spray anybody that he could get of the performers.

So they would come back with.... They tried holding his water so many hours beforehand. That didn't work. He would present, raise the tail, raise the leg, and here is the audience looking at this you-know-what of a lion's bum for the big finale. Eventually the lion went bye-bye.

In the beginning they had a number called *Night and Day* with gorgeous rhinestone costumes. Every girl was in a floor-length rhinestone from head to foot. They were either black or they were white, and they had matching big huge fans made out of ostrich feathers. They were alternating black and white. They were just exquisite, and they were made in France. We probably had thirty-six pairs of them. We didn't know where to put these feathers, Don Arden would rehearse one dance number until people were exhausted, and then after a week of that go on to something else. We thought, "Okay, let's get rid of the stuff we're not going to use for the next week or two and go on."

Where can we put these things? Well, in the basement by the big double doors that came over where the trucks delivered and things went in and out—they would bring in the horses every night and they would bring in the ostrich—there were three rooms in descending order down on the side of this ramp. The bottom room was empty, and I went down and asked, "Is this going to be used for anything in the next, say, three, four weeks? Would it be all right if we laid sheets down, laid these big feather fans out, covered them, locked the door, went away, and left it?"

They said, "Be our guest." That is what we did—laid out all these fans. Sometimes we had to double them, but each pair to its

own were all laid out on the floor on big huge sheets. We covered it all up, locked the door, and walked away.

About three or four weeks later, it was time for those fans. I went down, unlocked the door, opened it up and went [gasp], “What in the—?” I’m seeing this dark, gold darkish-brownish stain on a whole bunch of the sheets, and I lifted them up and the feathers are just.... They had brought in the lion in the interim and his room was the room slightly up the incline from where the feathers were. So every time the lion went pee-pee and every time they washed the cage and the floor, where did the urine water from the lion run? It soaked the feathers. We just stood there and looked at that...we didn’t know whether to cry, scream, or run out the door.

As it ultimately turned out, you can wash ostrich feathers if they are not too rotted. [laughs] Wwe just looked at some of them and said, “That will disintegrate. There is nothing we can do about that.” We had to, at great expense, send to France for more of these fans to be made. That was the famous lion-pee ostrich fan-feather story. [laughs]

Massacre of...

Of the feathers. Who would have ever thought? Talk about being just stone speechless. Anyway, there’s a lot of stories, as I said, eleven years from that show. The horse falling in a trough was an important thing. The night the magician...why he felt he needed to ride off at the end of his act on a white horse, no one could quite understand, especially when he didn’t know how to handle one. He got the horse turned around backwards to the audience, and instead of taking the time to turn the horse around... the horse was freaked and he kept trying to get up on it, and the horse stepped back. He

kept trying and the horse stepped back, and the next thing you know, [demonstrates], the horse was off on the table. The people were running and screaming, jumping out of the way. [laughs]

The Roman chariot with the four horses... there was a line when you came out and went around that you were not to go onto this ring. For two different scenes this trough would open up and accept the water that came down in what they called the rain curtain. It happened in one space scene, and from the cascade of water that came down the mountainside during the underground scene. There was a trench and it was full of pipes to catch the water to recycle it.

Whoever was driving the chariot that night, the downstage horse got out too far onto the water thing. It collapsed under him, and the horse fell in the trough. Fortunately, the horse was well trained enough that it didn’t really struggle. The *Circus* is close to the end so they disconnected the horse and had one of his owners and a couple people that knew horses literally got down in the trough with it to keep it quiet until the show was over. They could then figure out how to get him out, which they did without incident. It wasn’t seriously hurt or anything.

Microphones got mixed up one night. The gal that was out doing the Judy Garland *Wizard of Oz* number, “Over the Rainbow,” went to sing into the microphone, and they had turned on the microphone of Sheila back in the dressing room instead of the gal that was out on stage. It took a beat or two before we realized that something was wrong, and you couldn’t hear the gal that was singing it. So Sheila started to sing it from the dressing room with her microphone, but she didn’t know the words. [laughter] “Somewhere over the rainbow, da, da, da. Somewhere over the rainbow.” [laughter] She was frantically with

one hand saying, "Feed me lyrics!" Then she would sing. "Feed me more lyrics!" I wish I could have had that on video, because the look on her face was sheer panic.

The gal out on the front of the stage did not know what was going to come out of Sheila's mouth next because she didn't know the lyrics, and so here she is out there just mouthing something, because she didn't... that went on painfully long.

The orchestra, of course, was in its own little world in this orchestra room in the basement. It was done through closed-circuit TV. The orchestra conductor's is doing... [demonstrates]. It was just sheer craziness. Finally Sheila just kind of got to the point where she hit a high note and quit, because you can't go on forever with that. Yes, it was just craziness.

The injuries personality stuff, and egos when you get that many people together. [laughs] On a sad note, that was the time when the AIDS epidemic hit. It was a fact. It was a factor and it was life. I'm going to have to say that out of the male cast and crew, there was that I know of personally, about twenty-six men that wound up dying in those few years in the eighties when that hit. It was devastating to everybody because nobody knew what was happening. People were being shunned by their families and didn't have...they had only friends within the showbiz community to turn to. It was a very tough time to get through. It seemed like every time you turned around, there was somebody else passing away. That was just a fact of the time.

It was very close-knit group, particularly the people that stayed for five, ten, or the eleven years that it ran. They became very close-knit, and a lot of them have remained friends still. It just was a very sad day when it closed.

We had a lot of celebrities there. We got to meet a ton of celebrities over the years. I turned around one night backstage, and the producer was standing there. Because of my medical background along the line somewhere, he had discussed some health issues. He came up to me and he said something about that, so we were standing there talking. It's very dark backstage, depending on what's going on, and I realized there was another gentleman standing next to him. In a lull, I looked up and I went, "Oh, hmm. Good evening, Mr. Grant. How are you?" It was Cary Grant. He was on the board of directors in the beginning for MGM. He had come to visit everybody, and so I had a nice little chat.

I toured Shirley MacLaine backstage through everything, and everybody who was anybody—Elizabeth Taylor, Rod Taylor... everybody was there at one point. Donald O'Connor was there, and the dancers were so excited to see him. He was just amazing in his day, and he just kept looking about and saying, "I haven't seen anything like this since the old MGM studio." MGM had big moviemaking warehouses—those big huge buildings that they had where they made those big huge musicals. He said, "I haven't seen anything like that until this." He was almost as excited to be there as we were to have him backstage.

Did producers or directors change over during the time that the show was running?

No. Don Arden came in, directed it, and left. He may have come back once or twice once it opened, but he went on to the next thing. We had a show manager, and Bill D'Angelis was the producer. He was in and out a fair amount, just keeping track and keeping an eye on things.

One of the things that it was particularly known for...The first show manager was from

France and he was originally with the Paris Opera. He was only there maybe for a year or two. Gillian Hrushowy took over, and her and her assistant Adrian Lepeltier, were ex-dancers. They came right out of the show, and they were sticklers for detail and for making sure that when those girls kicked, they all kicked in unison. When they turned, they turned in unison.

There were captains for each group, and those captains rehearsed and reported to Gillian and Adrian. They were forever rehearsing and making sure that those numbers stayed just absolutely perfect.

I watch some of those old musicals in the movies—some of the really early ones—and I just cringe. The girls are all over the place. Nobody's arm is the same. Nobody's kick is the same. Nobody's turn is the same. I think, "Oh, my god." That never would have happened with *Hello Hollywood*. "It was precision and smiles. Those were important when you got out there."

It was an amazing time. It was an amazing time for the city. That is when Reno just exploded in population. To have all these beautiful young things in town, coming from all over the world... they came from New Zealand, Australia, Europe, South Africa, and Canada, and to have them out and about in the town...

One cute story was one of the first groups that came stayed in, of all places (now we're talking thirty years ago) in Amesbury Place off of Grove Avenue. They didn't think anything of it. They couldn't go out and lay in the sun and have tan lines, so they were out there in just their bikini bottoms, just like you would be on the French coast. Of course, people called the police. [laughter]

So two police showed up and they were overheard, as they were standing there admiring the scenery, saying, "Do we really have to arrest them?" [laughs]

We used to laugh and say one of the favorite after-hours places to meet, was Albertson's or Raley's—a grocery store that was open. There would be all these beautiful young things in there with their eyelashes four inches long and their full makeup because maybe they just didn't take it off before they went home. They were in there buying milk, bread, and bananas. [laughs]

So just slowly...as I said, it was a culture shock in the beginning for a lot of the old-time locals, but it changed the flavor of Reno. It's one of the things that changed it.

How did the show compare to other shows in Reno?

It blew them out of the water. There was nothing anywhere close to it. There was just nothing close to it, and anybody who had anybody come in from out of town took them to that show. Most of the other casinos had, for the most part, headliners, like Sammy Davis Jr. MGM did too. We had Frank Sinatra and other different people in. They had small cabaret shows, but there was nothing close to it.

How did the show compare to what was happening at the time nationally and internationally?

Well, the only thing I can compare it to is shows in Vegas and in Paris. In Vegas, as I say, that same show is still going but it is a smaller production. It is a smaller stage. It always was. MGM just had the largest stage in the world at that time.

In Paris you would be absolutely astounded at how small the stage is. The Moulin Rouge is two hundred years old. It is amazing what they crammed onto that stage. That stage wouldn't even be an eighth or a sixteenth of the size of

the one at the MGM (which is now the Grand Sierra Resort).

They had shows in Japan, China, South Africa, Paris, and different places, but nobody had a show of the size or the complexity with the different buildings collapsing, spaceships coming down out of the ceiling, bridges going across the entire theater, and just the mechanics and the technology of the show.

Vegas since has had some marvelous things, but they are different. The MGM down there has had some really mind-blowing shows, and I think the Tropicana used to have one that was similar in its style. So did the Lido. They had that same type of what I call the Paris revue-type show. They don't anymore, though.

Can you tell me how you got involved with the Nevada Opera?

We had moved away for a few years. When we came back to Reno, we decided to purchase season tickets. I called the office and inquired about season tickets. Then I said, "Oh, by the way, how do you handle...do you do your wardrobe, your costuming, and stuff with volunteers? How is it that you go about doing that?"

She said, "Why?"

I said, "Well, I was interested in volunteering or seeing how you handle you costume and your wardrobe department."

She said, "Do you have experience in costuming?"

I said, "Um, yes."

She said, "Well, would you mind coming down and talk to us? We have lost our wardrobe/costume person. Could you just tell me briefly about your experience?"

I said, "Well, I worked at *Hello Hollywood* for eleven years."

She went, "Oh, then you must know X, Y, and Z."

I said, "Oh, of course." I knew Lesley Bandy and all of them.

She said, "Oh, if you are at all interested, please come down and talk to us."

So I did, and then she said, "Well, I'll present your information to the board, and then we'll get back with you."

Within a very short period of time, they called back and offered me the position of their costume mistress or wardrobe manager.

That was ten years ago, and that is how it came to be. I have enjoyed it. The first couple years were kind of rough. Quite frankly, not the board, but the management people that they had in there were, I found, very difficult and unfriendly. I nearly quit two or three times.

We got a new artistic director and executive director. Mainly the artistic director, who was Michael Borowitz...he was the artistic director, and the maestro conductor. We hit it off right off the bat and just over the years have become very much very close friends. He's kind of like an adopted son. I said, "I'm old enough to be not only your mother but then some." [laughs] Anyway, it has just gone along. Ten years have gone by and I have no idea where it has gone.

The opera is extremely financially strapped. We have been in bad financial condition before, for one reason or another, and managed to get major pledge drives going and dig our way out. Opera is one of the most expensive pieces of entertainment of any kind that you can put on, though, with the orchestra, the conductor, the director, the crew, the performers, the rental space, the technicians and the lighting. It's very expensive to mount a full-size opera, and the money just simply hasn't been there. The grants are drying up. The personal donations from people are drying up. People with these economic times being what they are, if they

have the money they are reluctant to let go of it, and understandably so. Some of them simply don't have it anymore. Anyway, we're pretty much down to rock bottom again, and refusing to give up. Hopefully, we can just scale back, regroup, and go forth. It has been here, I believe, forty-three years.

On a side note, I just heard from someone yesterday that Reno Little Theater, which, of course, is struggling financially like everything else.... It has been trying to build a new theater which at this point is just pretty much a black box. They have been performing at [Proctor R.] Hug High for some time, and for whatever reason (according to this person anyway), that is going to end. I am assuming that it is true, and I have no idea what their plan is, what they can do, or what will happen.

If things go as the legislature and the governor have decreed, the Theater Department at UNR will be closing down and the Dance Department will be closing down. Hopefully the Music Department does not follow. This community is going to be in dire trouble as far as the arts are concerned, if the opera should not go forth or goes on hiatus for a while. Reno Little Theater...I don't know what's happening there. There is Bruka.... There will be a major impact and people will say, "Well, we've got X amount of dollars to spend this month to go and do something, so what are we going to do besides go to a movie?" There is going to be precious little. It is very sad and very upsetting. At this point it is what it is.

Anyway, that is how I got started with the opera, and have enjoyed it. People say to me, "Are you ever going to retire?"

I say, "Well, I don't know. I love what I do. As long as I can do it and they want me, I'll just hang in there until I fall over or something." [laughs] We will just see.

We did have a good laugh and this particular opera was no exception. Michael said, "It wouldn't be Nevada Opera if we didn't have a crisis at some point just before the show—within the week or two." The crisis this time was our four leads—the count, the countess, Figaro, and Bartolo—all got food poisoning the Monday night before opening. So at the first full rehearsal on stage we didn't have our four leads. [laughs] They don't want to look at guacamole again for a while. [laughter]

That was the big crisis for this one. I remember *Madame Butterfly*. I can't quite remember right at the moment what happened to Pinkerton, who's the main male lead. We lost him about the Monday before, though. Whatever the reason...he either walked out, quit, or got fired. Michael came trotting back to me and saying, "Well, we're going to have a new Pinkerton."

I just swallowed hard and said, "Okay."

He said, "Any criteria?"

I said, "Well, it would be nice if he was around the same size as the gentleman that has left, because that's the costume that we have."

He said, "Okay."

I said, "Well, I know you are going to have to get who you get." The guy that left was about five-nine or five-ten, and the gentleman that we got was six-foot-five. [laughs] That was a problem, but it got solved, as they always do.

The *Mikado*—that was really a bizarre thing. All of our wigs and Chinese fruv-frus—the little dinkle-dankles and flowers for the hair... The headpieces for the men and the wigs for the ladies were all on a UPS truck. This was in February, and there was this big storm over the pass, and, unfortunately one of those umpteen truck/car pileups. I will preface this by saying the UPS driver did survive, thank heaven, but the truck and the

contents (including all of our wigs and hats), burst into flames and floated down the river. [laughs] That was about two or three nights before our opening night.

That is when our wig lady, who comes from out of state just put in a call to everybody she could think of. Wigs came trickling in, two and three at a time. We also constructed a bunch of stuff. So everybody went out and nobody knew that yes, our stuff went floating down the river—the charred remains. [laughs]

I used to work at UPS. I can only imagine getting that phone call. "By the way, truck's on fire."

By the way, the truck's on fire and the stuff is floating down the river. As I said, the main concern, of course, was the driver. I don't know the extent of his injuries, but he did survive it. So that was the big thing.

It just seems like we've lost directors at the last minute. We've lost leading ladies at the last minute; they get sick or their voices go out for some reason. Reno is very hard on singers' voices. It is so dry. Between the altitude and the dryness, let's face it.... We have local singers in the chorus and sometimes some of our other... one of our main leads in *Figaro* is from here. Even though it can bother them, they're used to it. People come from the South and from here and from there, and their nasal passages and their sinuses are just not used to all this. A lot of time we have little humidifiers going in their dressing rooms to keep them lubricated.

Do you remember who has worked at the Opera in different positions?

Robin Stamper was the artistic director/conductor prior to Michael Borowitz. Rick was the first executive director that I remember

being there. Zoe Rose was in charge of publicity and props. She was a longtime Renoite. Her husband was a fairly well-known newspaper-type person.

We went through a series of executive directors, Bill Russell being one and Diana Hoffman being one. There was another lady in there too. They just came for maybe a year or two and then they were gone. Steven Meyer has been the executive director. He is a local man and very talented in what he does. Actually, I've known him going back to *Hello Hollywood* days.

Don Smith has been the technical guru. He does all the Broadway shows that come in. He has a company, but he's been a faithful supporter and doer—backbone of the Opera for twenty years or longer. His wife, Sherry, is the stage manager. She's been with them for a long time. They are wonderful people who are very talented and extremely knowledgeable in what they do.

The fact that we are going to have to do whatever it is we are going to have to do for this next little while...the family's kind of shifting, and you're not quite sure how it is all going to wind up in a year or two. Hopefully most everybody that loves opera and loves the company will still be there in some capacity.

Where have the performances been held over the years?

Since I've been there, they have always been at the Pioneer. I believe, for the most part, prior to that they were at the Pioneer. Ted Puffer was the founder of the Opera, and his widow, Deena, is still alive. Thirty or forty years ago...I'm just not sure whether it has always been at the Pioneer or if they may have started out in a smaller venue someplace. I'm not sure where that would have been because we don't have a lot.

Opera needs for full operas...it's difficult to do a full opera in a smaller venue. The audience needs to be separated to some degree from the stage. You need the sound of a larger room—the acoustics are everything. It's difficult. It's very difficult to do opera in a small venue. It just doesn't come off right somehow. Like I said, it's been the Pioneer. Pioneer has been good to the Opera, and hopefully we can continue to keep doing some things there.

How is Pioneer as a facility?

Well, it's aging, to say the least. It was built in the fifties when the geodesic dome look was the "in" thing—our grand golden turtle down there. They do a good job with the limited funds that they have. I wasn't here during the flood when water was up the wall like this backstage, on the stage, in the theater—everywhere. It is aging, the equipment is aging, and the dressing rooms are tiny. It's sad sometimes to bring in really big-name performers, not just for opera but for other things, and the facilities are kind of sad.

Everything you need, basically, is there, though. You have your lighting, deck, theater, curtains, bathrooms; and mirrors. It is limited in space, which limits the size of the productions that can come in. It's limited, of course, not only in terms of the size of the stage, but the backstage, where you put your sets. We have gotten very creative over the years when we have had large-cast productions. When I say large, I mean somewhere between fifty and sixty cast members. Especially if you have kids involved you can't have them in the same dressing room with the adults.

We have a method called pipe and drape, where we have these big metal poles on round

bases, and we simply create an area with curtains and drapes. We put up some tables, mirrors, and lights and create extra dressing rooms. Those are wedged in between the sink, the washer, the dryer, and up a flight of stairs, or up in the exhibition hall. It gets done, though.

It's amazing how many rooms there are in that theater downstairs. There is even another floor below that. It's just a rabbit warren of rooms. A lot of them are not convenient to the main stage. They do have that small underground stage that now is used for Kaylin and Ginger—the magic show. They have a comedy troupe in there now, as well. So that is a nice, smaller venue.

Like I said, they do a good job with the funds that they have available to them. As always, it comes down to money. I remember I was so angry an election or two ago, when one of the things on the ballot was a fourth-of-a-cent increase on something...room tax, TVs, or sales tax in general. It was a fourth of a cent, which to the average family wouldn't make a buck or two, depending on what you bought. If you bought a washing machine that month.... The increase was to have gone to refurbishing, fixing, providing some money for the upkeep of the arts facilities, and for doing something with the Lear Theater (that just languishes). It is such a beautiful little place, and it just languishes for lack of money.

People voted it down. If it were for football or soccer, they wouldn't have voted it down. Sometimes people will vote that kind of thing for parks and trails, but when it comes to the arts...I just have never understood it. It is such a piddly amount. As with all of those kind of things, that little adds up over a year's time. It was voted down, though, so they just keep piecemealing things together.

Do you think not supporting that bond is typical of Reno?

I think it's typical of Reno and typical of Nevada. I don't know whether people are so... it used to be when we were first here and with Reno Little Theater, we competed constantly with the casino shows. We always used to say, "Well, we can only hope to bring in a certain segment and a certain amount, because there are all these other shows to go to."

Well, there isn't anymore, but it's almost like people have a mindset of some sort.... In the last few years, it's just no to everything—no to schools, no to this, no to that. You want to live in a civilized society, you want to have your kids educated well, and you want to have money for the arts and for other things. It has to come from somewhere.

Which productions have you enjoyed working on at the Nevada Opera?

One of the most incredible productions that we did was *Merry Widow*. If you are a real true opera buff, that's not probably considered a great opera, but it is visually stunning and the music is uplifting and fun. The audiences just love it. We, at that time, were much more plush than we are now, and so we spent a ton of money on costumes and sets. It was just a joy to do. It was so beautiful. We had so much fun from the wardrobe point of view of being able to costume all these women in these gorgeous ball gowns and big beautiful hats. Everybody was borrowing jewelry and getting jewelry from here and from there. It just was a fun production.

Gilbert and Sullivan operas are always fun—*Pirates of Penzance* and all of those. They're fun and energetic. I love *Traviata*, *Tosca*, and, of course, *La Bohème*.

When it gets down to dress rehearsals, especially the second dress rehearsal and the Wednesday night, final rehearsal for which we invite a small guest audience of people from senior homes, and student groups from schools,

I'm always out there taking notes. I am looking at hems to see is this straight, is that straight, does that person need different earrings, is that one missing something, or is anyone wearing their wedding ring and forgetting to take it off. I can see that one needs a hat or that one needs a shawl. So, I'm just taking notes.

For *La Bohème*, there was another lady sitting out there with me from wardrobe. The tenor at the time, whose name is John Pickle and who has a wonderful voice, was doing his thing. Man, he was just doing it full out. I looked over at her when he was all done, and she had tears. How many times have you heard it? The tears are just kind of.... I looked at her and I said, "That is why we're willing to forgive tenors for almost anything, because they can just move you."

I remember the very first opera I did. Actually, it was two. It was a shortened version of *Pagliacci* and then *Suor Angelica*. *Suor Angelica* is a story of fifteenth-century nuns in a convent, and one of them has had an illegitimate child. She comes from aristocracy, and she has had this child which her grandmother is raising. She has been put into the nunnery and not allowed to see the baby. Toward the end of the story, the child is maybe two, and the child dies. It is just incredibly sad, as is opera.

One of my daughters had come for it, and it was the first opera she really had seen. Afterwards she said, "I didn't expect to come and bawl my eyes out." [laughs]

I said, "Well, it's a powerful, sad story." That is what opera is about a lot of times. It's treachery, lust, romance, murder, and betrayal.

Somebody said one time, "Well, what's this opera about?"

Somebody said, "Oh, you know, the typical—lust, betrayal, love, whatever, and the soprano dies."

Somebody else said, "And if you're lucky, the tenor does too." [laughs]

People who are passionate about it are passionate about it. The comedies are fun. *Figaro* is a comedy, and people were laughing. You would have thought they were listening to *Saturday Night Live*. They were just getting it. My favorites are the dramas. I think probably my all-time favorite, like a lot of people, is *La Bohème*.

How would you describe the quality of the productions?

I would say a good percent of the time they're very good quality. It is not Metropolitan Opera quality, obviously, but we can stand right up there with any regional opera company from cities that are considerably larger than us. I have heard that from any number of people that have been all over—to San Francisco, New York, and perhaps even in Europe, depending on the production. It's always dependent on who your singers are and who your director is, but they're very good quality here. For the most part, they are very good quality. They do a good job.

Do you know the names for some of the local people who sing for the Nevada Opera?

Suzette Tunney just finished being our Suzanna, which is a lead. She is on stage almost the entire opera. It's just an exhausting role. She is this lovely talented little thing. She doesn't like to travel a lot. She is married, and so she does what she can do within Reno and a short radius.

John Fay used to do a lot with the Opera, though not so much in the last few years. Olivia Hackel was in this recent opera. Of course, all the chorus members are local, and

there are a lot of really talented people. Dr. Damon Stevens, from UNR, is our chorus master, rehearsal person, and our pianist. He is very talented. He came on board about two or three years ago.

Unfortunately, we have lost some very talented people that were with the Nevada Opera for a few years. People would divorce and move on. One of them was Andy Sonnamaker. He is the director now of the Music Department down at Carson High School in Carson. He is just so busy that he just can't do it anymore.

There is an amazing amount of talent in Reno. It used to be, and still is with the musicians for the orchestra...there is an amazing amount of talent, and a certain amount of them years ago, played in the house orchestras. So, they were really good.

When shows would come from out of town, they would be surprised at the quality of the musicians that they had and also the quality of the crew. They didn't understand... they would come into a town of, at that time, maybe 300,000 or 400,000 people and would say, "Reno? Where's that?" They came in and saw highly professional musicians and crews, and that would surprise them. It would be a great relief a lot of the times because they would come in, especially with the stage crew and wardrobe people, expecting to have to walk behind everybody saying, "Okay, well, take this off. Do this and do that. Do you know how to do a quick change?" They would do all of this and then realize they didn't have to do any of that. We used to just kind of stand back and smile. Until we would realize they are up to par, now they get it. It would just take a while.

As the nature of casino entertainment has changed, how has that affected the Nevada Opera?

Well, I can't speak for the orchestras. They sound wonderful to me, and the audiences seem to be very pleased. The Opera orchestra is made up, if not entirely, mainly of people who also play in the Reno Philharmonic and the Reno Chamber Orchestra, so they are professional. They know what they are doing. From there on, it is the quality of the conductor. I don't go to the shows in the showrooms much anymore. I have been there, done that, and seen them. There is not a lot there that holds much for me anymore.

It used to be that I would know people. I would know people to the extent that for a long time I didn't have to pay to get in. It is hard for me to say how that affects who they have.

How does Reno seem to embrace the Nevada Opera?

The people that enjoy opera embrace it. They have given generously over the years, for the most part. This recession has just kicked the snot out of everyone, though. We've lost some of what we call our angels—the people that are the big donors. They have either aged to the point where they need the money, they are just not willing to give it up, or they have passed on and their children...what may have been a lot of money for a couple is now split four and five ways, and they may not have the same interests or the desire to donate as their parents. That has hit us hard, losing Barbara Long, the Dandinis, Carole Buck, and Moya Lear.

I've understood that even the Philharmonic...they're better off financially than the Opera but they're feeling the pinch as well. I don't know how badly they are feeling it, but I know they did cut back on their big Christmas production that they usually do.

Generally how well attended are performances, and has that changed at all?

It can be as bad as four and five hundred people for a performance, or sold out to the walls. Gilbert and Sullivan operas very often will sell out, but you can't do Gilbert and Sullivan all the time. Our last opera *Vanessa*, did not do well. It was not a well-known opera, and it just didn't do well. *Figaro*, I do believe, was probably more than half to three-quarters sold for the two performances.

Then people say, "Can you only do this twice? Why do you only do it twice? Why don't you do it three and four times?" There is only a core of people that come to opera. If you spread it out over three or four days, that same amount of people come, you just have smaller audiences for each performance. It costs you to pay the Pioneer to turn the lights on and to get your volunteer ushers down there. So we funnel it, literally, into the two performances.

For opera, which a lot of other organizations don't do, there is a dark night in between. We have our dress rehearsals Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Wednesday has a small audience of invitees. Thursday is dark. We're off so the singers can rest their voices. Friday is opening night, Saturday is an off night and then, of course, we have a performance Sunday. That is not something that other entities have to do.

So total population...my best guess would be somewhere around 5,000 people, give or take, and that's only based really on attendance and a few other minor events. So that is not a lot for a population of wherever we are now—500,000. You are not going to fill a stadium like a football game, but most of the people that do come to opera are pretty passionate about it. I'm sure that they want to

see it continue. Money—that is just true with everything.

When you have people say, “Well, I’ve got fifty bucks I can give to somebody this month. Which one of the hundred organizations out there that need the money do we give it to?” People’s choices are their own.

How much do the tickets cost?

We came down a little bit on our ticket prices and came down a little bit on the season ticket prices, but I believe they run about between \$28 and \$65. Considering, that is not bad when you look at other things in town and they’re that much and more. If you do reasonably well on your ticket sales for a production, that only pays about a third of the cost of mounting the opera.

People say, “Well, didn’t you sell 3,000 tickets for that?” Yes, and that probably paid for the orchestra. The orchestra is union, which is neither here nor there, but they have to be paid and it is an X amount. It’s actually around \$ 35,000 dollars just for the orchestra. If you were in a bigger city someplace, it would be twice that and more. It is all relevant.

The state has various grants. There are federal grants out there. There are endowments. There are foundations. Being a grant writer is a whole other thing, and a good grant writer can just about name their price. It is difficult to find where these grants are and to write the grants saying just exactly the right thing to say in order to get them to give you the money. There are entities out there, but there again, things are drying up. It is even drying up from the Feds and the state. Everything is drying up.

The casinos used to be far more generous than they are now, but then they are not making the money they used to. Big corporations like

IGT and some others still do donate, but not to the extent that they used to. It is the same thing with individuals. I’ve worked a couple telethons, and people are sympathetic. They will say, “I love the Opera. I don’t want to see you go away. My wife just lost her job, and I’m worried I may lose mine, and we just can’t do it this time. Call us in six months.” I get it, but it’s just the way it is.

When the Opera has experienced financial difficulties in the past, do you have a sense of how it was able to bounce back?

Well, unfortunately, when you are coming from being a couple hundred thousand dollars down, you blitz around the world. For anybody that has ever known about it ever, performed, done it, it doesn’t matter. If you get five bucks or twenty bucks...and you dig yourself out of that hole. Now you are even. Where does the money come from for the next one you want to do? You have to start that begging all over again.

That is basically what happened this last time. They may have gotten a little bit more than getting themselves unburied, but not enough to mount the next opera or to say, “We have our funds secured for the entire next season.” That just doesn’t happen. It is just ongoing, and people get tired of being constantly asked for money. They think, “Well, I paid this for this ticket, and now you want me to donate more.”

It’s hard for some people to understand what it takes to put an opera on. Some people don’t care; they just want to come and see it. They think, “Well, it’s up to you to get it done. It’s not up to me. I just want to pay my ticket, come and see it, and go home.” I don’t know where the answer lies, other than in a better economy... that is not going to happen for a while.

I know there are companies that have folded or gone on hiatus—“hiatus”—and some of them are surprising, like Baltimore Opera, Sacramento Opera, Pacific Northwest Opera, and some ballet companies. We just lost Nevada Festival Ballet. Even some of the big ones in New York City are all cutting back. They’re all retrenching. People say, “Well, we want to see a big full opera.” We would love to do one.

I know it’s the same refrain over and over again. I also realize that you have to manage the money well. You have to manage the money well, otherwise people can say, “Oh, well, let’s just spend \$5,000 on the curtains for this one five-minute scene in this one act.” Well, you can’t do that. I’ve known this opera and theater groups need to have a financial head on your...somebody in the group on the board or somewhere in the powers-that-be has to understand the artistic end of it, but they also have to have a pencil that’s sharp enough to say, “No, we can’t afford that. Go figure out some other way of doing it. Go. Go. Go.”

What’s the general makeup of the Nevada Opera audience?

It’s a pretty broad spectrum. It used to be the people had the idea that only the upper crust, came in their...

Monocles...

Monocles and minks. [laughter] The mink and monocle crowd. There are still a few, but Reno is a casual town, as we well know. If it’s the right opera, people bring their kids. We do have the Youth Chorus. They perform all over and sometimes in our productions when we need children. For *La Bohème*, my goodness, we had a ton of kids in that one. They do their

thing. They go to nursing homes or retirement centers. They’re quite good. They are a good little group.

So, you get people coming of all ages. You really do. Probably the majority of the audience is middle age and older. You do get a good number...I’d say maybe a third or so of the audience is forty and under. Most of them try and dress up a little bit, but some will still come in their Levis. I think that’s part of what the Opera loves to project when they do the Opera in Blue Jeans for Artown—it is for everyone. Opera is for everyone, and you can come in your Levis and t-shirt. We don’t care.

Much of the classical music is music that you hear today. You’ve heard it from the Beatles. You’ve heard it from even today in some of the rockers. You hear it in commercial jingles, and people don’t realize that it is Mozart jazzed up a little. They don’t know that because they haven’t taken music courses. It is everywhere, though, all that old classical stuff.

I thought it was wonderful when the Olympics were held in Italy and they had [Luciano] Pavarotti do the aria from *Nesum Dorma*—the incredible one. People were...I mean, teenagers that normally wouldn’t pay attention to anything were just going. So it is there in life, and a lot of people just don’t recognize what it is or where it comes from.

How do you prepare for an opera production?

It starts out, first off, hopefully knowing at the beginning of the season what we’re doing that year. I go to my opera book and read up on them, and then I go along. As my doctor said one time, “Well, you go along and you go along and you go along, and it’s okay. You’re not [stressed]. Then you get kind of busy, and then all of a sudden it’s two weeks of panic.”

I said, "Yeah, you got that right." It is a matter of them casting, my finding out who's in the cast. I meet with the artistic director and ask, "Where are we, or where have you decided we are going to get the costumes from?"

I get in contact with them, and get them the cast list and all the measurements in to them. I keep a file for some people, if I haven't seen them for an opera or two, I'll call them up and say, "Here I am with my embarrassing questions, but have you gained or lost ten pounds since I saw you last?" [laughs] For costumes, bigger is better because we can always take something in, but sometimes you can't let something out, or it's very difficult to. If there are new people or somebody has lost a ton of weight or gained a ton of weight, you re-measure them.

Sometimes there's a little lull in there. I start going to a few rehearsals, just seeing and looking. I can say, "We're going to need this for that, and we need da, da, da, da..." I get with the stage manager and the prop person. Are we going to need to make... we don't make prop props per se, but sometimes we do come up with props or make something for them. What kind of an umbrella do you need for that?

The opera will tell you what timeframe you are working in. Every once in a while the director will decide to do something, like the *Pagliacci* I did. That was set in pre-Fascist Italy done in the thirties, so that is not the timeframe that it was written for.

Then it just gets busier and busier. I wait for the costumes to arrive, which is always a dicey thing because you never know for sure when they're going to get here. They get here, generally speaking, a week and a half before we open.

[When they arrive] I get down there, get everything undone, unloaded, unpacked,

checked in—every piece, every choker, every bracelet, every petticoat, and every pair of socks. You get what we call the bible of the cast—who is wearing what. Some characters have three to six changes of costumes, and every piece that comes with it. There is never just a gown. There is the gown, the hat, a purse, the earrings, a petticoat, pantaloons, and for this one paniers. Paniers are that French hoop. Not the round hoop, but the hoop that goes out from the hips that you have to turn to go through a door in. The doors in France were big double doors so women could walk through them.

Then I call in my crew and we start fittings. Fittings are nuts, because when you've got forty or fifty people, and some of them have got multiple costumes.... We get them in there, get them fit and pinned. We just go like stink from there. Usually the worst part is that weekend prior, because people work during the day, so it's hard. If you can get some of them in in the evening for fittings... then you just get started and you just go like stink.

Depending on the opera, some are easier than others. Sometimes you're there six, seven, eight hours. Sometimes you're there twelve to fourteen hours or more, and you just are doing.... Somebody blows out their pants, their button falls off, their top won't stay up, or their this won't that, and you are gluing foam in hats so that hats aren't too big and fall off.

It just goes on like this until hopefully by opening night day, you can say, "Okay, if I drop dead right now, this show could go on costume-wise. It's done." That is until somebody's something falls off.

It's just a panic for that week going into it getting everybody squared away. Then you do costumes on the Monday night. Tuesday and Wednesday we do full wigs and makeup, and costumes. Getting that coordinated...

your call times change. You have two or three wig and makeup people, and they're stacking them up like cordwood. They are trying to get them in, get their makeup done, and get their wigs glued on.

Every once in a while you'll get somebody that will have one of these big elaborate wigs done, and you say, "You're not in your skirt." Now how do we do this? Do we get it up, over, around, and through? Generally, people are professional enough that they don't get into that situation, but occasionally....

Then the show is done. You have your load-out, which everybody comes back in for, except for the principals. They all have to stand in line with everything. I've got them pretty well trained. They hang their stuff back up, and keep their nametag on the hangars. They stand in line and I just go down the line checking their costumes. "Okay, skirt, bodice, blouse, mobcap, shawl, brown socks. Okay, thank you. Hang it over there."

I then load everything, box it all up, tape it all up, label it, clean up everything, and go home and...

Sleep for like four days?

Exactly. That is about it. People think because you send in measurements and you rent costumes, that they come, you put them on, and that's it. Things don't fit. When you have period ball gowns that have a bodice that you lace up the back and has stays in it.... We talk about it all the time—it's universal—they come short-waisted. I don't know why. Women are from the bosom to here, and these things will come....

We jerk the skirt up far enough, attach it to the bodice, and then shorten the petticoat... there is never anything to let out on those. They are full of stays, and they are a pain in the neck. Whenever I see something like

Carmen where it has military uniforms, I just blanch. They're always made for guys that are five-foot-ten to six-foot, thirty-four-inch waist to thirty-six-inch waist, and a forty-inch chest. For the majority of the chorus in the opera, these are adult men. They have got tummies, and they are thirty to forty pounds overweight. Invariably, you send the measurements, and the uniforms come and the sleeves are to here. They are in them like this. These come to about here if you are lucky. [laughs] There is a six to seven-inch gap across the abdomen. You have to get it to work, though. You have to make it work.

I remember in the last *Carmen* we did, we had one guy that there was no way that a military jacket...there was not anything that we could do to get it to fit him. I said, "Okay, you go in your pants, your boots, your shirt, and the jacket you sling over your shoulder. [laughs] You're one guy that is too hot to have that on that day, so just sling that sucker over your shoulder. That is the way you're going to have to do it." It's like sticking the doughboy in something that belonged to somebody that had anorexia. It just didn't work. There was no way.

So just because they come rented, sometimes we do have to.... We did make all the costumes for one opera, and we've made bits and pieces for others, like capes and different things for others. That little mobcap that you're looking at right there I threw together because we were short a mobcap. It just depends. Each and every one is different.

Are there any notable or general changes that you've seen over the years with Nevada Opera?

I would have to say that because of lack of funds, of not being able to do things with the quality that we'd like, and not being able to spend the money frivolously, like \$5,000 on a

curtain for five minutes.... To be able to rent the costumes from a really top place so that you know that the costumes are going to be really elegant and really please the audience. That's one of the main things, and we've tried very hard to not have it show to the audience. We have scrimped, we have scraped, and found sets and costumes in amazing places that you wouldn't think normally to look.

That is probably the biggest thing, and not be able to afford to do some productions because the set just simply costs too much money. To some extent it affects the quality of what you do and the choice of offers that you make.

Can you tell me about movie productions that you've worked on?

Well, the first one was a movie called *Matilda*, and it was an awful movie. [laughs] The premise was a boxing kangaroo that came here to box with somebody at Harrah's. They built a boxing arena, and all that. Robert Mitchum and Elliott Gould were in it. Elliot Gould was more famous. He has made *Oceans Eleven* and all those movies, but at the time he was either still married to or recently divorced from Barbra Streisand. He is the father of her only child. So we talked about braces and things on kids. [laughs] I can't even remember who else was in it. This was a number of years ago, because my daughters were young teenagers—fourteen and fifteen age—and I have a picture of one or two of them sitting on Robert Mitchum's lap. He was very friendly, but he was very friendly in the movie. It's just that the movie was a turkey. [laughs] Or kangaroo, as I would call it.

Gary Howell: I was in as an extra. When they did the extra scenes in the boxing arena, they only had so many extras, so they said,

"Okay, when we shoot the camera from this angle, I want everybody lined up on the other side of the ring. Then when they shoot it from a different angle, everybody that was in front get in back, everybody that was in back get in front."

That was a way to use lesser amounts of people. You start out with a pool of extras, and you almost invariably lose them as you go along. I've done extra work. I am on screen briefly in a couple things, but I mostly have done wardrobe costuming with movies.

The next movie that I did was *Melvin and Howard*, which was the story of Melvin Dummar. Melvin supposedly found this will or found this man wandering in the desert who turned out to be Howard Hughes, and supposedly Howard Hughes wrote this will and left everything to him. It had Mary Steenburgen, and I can't think of the guy who played Melvin. I was a motel maid in that one.

There was a series of movies. It seems like there was a timeframe in there that there were several movies being made here. I worked in wardrobe in *Bonanza: The Second Generation* movies that were filmed up at Tahoe and got to meet Loren Green's daughter and Michael Landon's son. There was Barbara Anderson, John Ireland, and John Amos. He is kind of remembered. He always plays a lot of generals and admirals. One of the things I always got a kick from was he played the father to Eddie Murphy in the movie where he was the prince that came to America to look for a bride. *Coming to America*, maybe. He was just delightful.

Certain problems arise sometimes. One thing was a problem up there because this is a western state and you have all these strangers and extras...the riding trench coats that cowboys wear are split up the back and have that extra flap over the back and shoulders.

Those were disappearing like grapes at a buffet. Cowboy hats were disappearing. We would find gloves. In fact, we found one coat hidden under a rock, someplace I suppose somebody was going to come back and get it later.

John Amos lost his hat somehow—his favorite, personal had-it-for-twenty-years cowboy hat. One day everything was coming back in and I looked at this one hat, and I looked at it and I looked at it. I went, “Ah, that looks like that didn’t just come out of the wardrobe place or the costume shop in Hollywood.” So I went looking for John, and I said, “I’m not sure, but I think I might have something you’re looking for.” I brought out and showed him. He was ecstatic beyond belief that I had found his hat. I had no idea. Some extra, was obviously wearing it and brought it back in. After several days, it showed up. It’s funny, things that happen. Filming up there in Tahoe, they filmed in November. It was cold.

You work enough movies, and I suppose it happens more than once, but one time there that it happened to me, and it’s just surreal. They took that...it is too bad that village up there is gone now, but wardrobe was way down on one end—the very far end of one end. They were starting to set up for night shooting. There was a bonfire and was all this stuff way on the other far end. They had changed the village from being like 1880 or 1890 to about 1905. They got rid of anything that looked modern—no telephone, no modern signs, no modern light posts, no nothing. The storefronts were all filled with period clothing and period canned goods and what have you. The wagons that were set up by what was to be the train depot, and there was a few horses tied up along the line. They had used them earlier in the day and they hadn’t taken them to the barn yet, and they were all tied up with their saddles just standing there.

I had to go down to the wardrobe to get something. I’m walking back up and it is really starting to get kind of dark. It is beyond dusk, but not dark, and there were some stars. I could see this faint glow of some movie lights and this bonfire way at the far end. I’m walking along, and all of a sudden I just stop dead in my tracks, and I thought, “My word, this is just surreal.” You were back in time. It was the strangest...there was nothing there anywhere that would have reminded you of being in the modern day. It was just one of the more surreal moments of my life. It was just really special. One of the horses was nickering at me, and I was petting their noses as I went by. It was amazing. That was a fun movie to work on.

One of the head wardrobe gals was not fun, but the rest of it was fun. Probably what happened with this head wardrobe lady is Barbara Anderson came to me.... She played Joe Cartwright’s wife, and in this timeframe Joe Cartwright had gone off to the Spanish-American War and was missing. They never said he had died. He was just missing. I think Michael Landon had started having his cancer problem at that point, so they weren’t sure whether they would ever be able to bring him back for anything or not, so he was missing.

They were setting up shots and trying to decide on what they wanted people to wear in the opening credits. Barbara was not happy with the period dress and hat that this gal had decided that she wanted Barbara to wear. Barbara just happened to be in wardrobe, and she came to me and said, “What do you think?”

I said, “Oh, lord. I’m just a local girl here.”

She said, “I don’t know. I’m just not happy with it. It just isn’t what I think she should...I don’t know what I think she should have on, but I’m not happy with that. Do you have any suggestions?”

I said, "Well, if my husband were away and missing and had been for some time, I would have a few of his things or his clothing. I would not have washed it. I would have it tucked away in a box somewhere or hanging in the back of a closet. When the occasion would arise, I would probably put on that old flannel shirt. I would wear it so that I could feel close to him and I could smell him in that piece of clothing."

Her face just lit up. She said, "That's what I want to do." We looked around and we found a red plaid, beat-up-ish flannel shirt, and they shot a scene with her out in the barn currying the horse in this shirt.

When the head wardrobe lady came back, she was not happy. She was not happy with me. She was not happy with Barbara. She was not happy about the whole thing. I understood her position, but Barbara had come to me and she had asked me. I didn't like what they had her in either. I thought, "Oh, well, I guess if I get fired over this, I get fired over it." [laughs] I didn't. Anyway, she was a happy camper that day, and that made me feel good.

They were just delightful. Michael Landon, Jr. was just delightful to have around. It was a fun experience, except for freezing your tooties off. [laughs]

There was *Blind Fury* with Rutger Hauer. *Kill Me Again* was with Val Kilmer and Joanne Whalley Kilmer.

It was in between takes, and one of the extras was standing around the crap table in this casino, and she was kind of tarted up. That was part of the role. She had long nails and she had, I don't know...she was just a little more than the average.... One of the extras elbowed me said, "Look at that one. Do you think she's from one of the houses like Mustang or something?"

I just said, "Oh, lord, I hope she didn't hear you say that, because that happens to be the star of the movie, Joanne Whalley Kilmer."

"Oh!" [laughs] People are funny.

I worked on *Pink Cadillac* with Clint Eastwood. He was fun. I see myself briefly in that one, so I was an extra. People don't want to leave Clint Eastwood alone, and they think that he is their best friend. They just constantly say, "Hey, Clint," right in the middle of a scene. Take that extra and have him go somewhere else. That was the movie where they crashed. They set up the corner door of the El Dorado with special glass. They moved all the slot machines out, brought in phony slot machines and extras. They had the car chase down Virginia Street with a stunt double, of course, on the roof and they crashed the car right through the whole cotton-picking thing, straight into the slot machines.

It's fun. I love watching movies being made. A lot of people just get bored silly watching the same thing over and over, taking forever to set up a shot...to me, I like to go to rehearsals on anything, whether it's a play or the opera. I enjoy watching the creative process, no matter what it is. So to me it's fun—long hours doing anything with movies.

Wardrobe and makeup are the first ones there, and the last ones to leave. You have to wait for everybody to get out of their stuff, go and collect it, get it to wherever it has to go, or throw it in the wash or get it to an overnight cleaners. You and makeup are there at four a.m. or five a.m. (or whatever time that you're called), and then you are the last one out of there, long after dark. It's long hours.

Call me stupid, I've always enjoyed it. I enjoyed every movie I have done for one reason or another. My husband and I both were extras in *The Cooler*, with William H. Macy. I said I would do anything to watch William H. Macy just work. Just watching him work, and Maria Bello work was fun.

One of the movies that I did that was extremely interesting for me was *Steal the Sky*.

That was the big opening movie for HBO on the whatever season it was. It was Ben Cross and Mariel Hemingway. Some of the character actors that I got close to in that movie I see all the time in various TV things playing professors and bad guys.

That movie was about the Egyptian-Israeli Seven-Day War, I guess it was. They filmed it all in Israel, except for a few scenes that were filmed in Rome. Then they had to come here to finish it off, because they needed working Russian MiGs and working U.S. Thunderbirds. Those planes were big in the fifties and sixties, and they not only needed the planes that were flyable, but they needed the pilots to be able to fly them. They are little. The fighter jets today are like woof they are huge, and these are little planes in comparison. They have them up here at Stead.

Apparently the MiGs were bought. Somebody some years ago bought half dozen, of the MiGs from the Polish Government when they were selling them. They were Russian-made MiGs. There they sit, along with the Thunderbirds.

My husband was a technical representative attached to a company, and we spent fifteen years attached in various places around the country, Alaska, and Canada with the Air Force. When we were up at this missile site in Canada, the planes that were being flown in and out at that time were the Thunderbirds. Most of our friends were pilots or navigators on these planes, and I used to see them getting in and out of their clunky flying gear at that time. Now they have one-piece suits and a zipper. In the day, it was an open framework—canvas-y, thick, and heavy with harnesses that came all the way up their legs, up their torso, and over their shoulders.

A couple of the pilots there...actually it was the National Guard. Some of the pilots from the National Guard knew how to fly

these things. The extras and Ben Cross had no idea—not a clue—how to get in and out of these things, and many a day the pilots that might have known weren't there. I happened to know how to get guys in to these harness outfits. They were amazed that I knew how to do this. I said, "Well, between seeing friends years ago in Canada and seeing the pilots up there get in and out of these, and getting showgirls in and out of some of the stuff they wore, I can figure this out pretty good." I was the go-to person, definitely, for getting these guys in and out.

It was also fun because the tower up there at Stead Air Force Base...they turned that into an Israeli tower with Hebrew signs, and they turned one of the hangars into an Iraqi hangar. It was a story of an Israeli spy who had an affair with an Iraqi pilot and got him to fly a Russian MiG to Israel prior to the war so they could study it before they got into the war and had to fight them. One of the hangars was turned into an Iraqi hangar, and they made up all these signs in whatever language that is. When some people from the crew from Israel came, they looked at those signs and said, "They're upside down." [laughter] We were lucky we even had them. Somebody had done them, but they were hung upside down. It didn't equate to anybody here.

We had an incident...I can really appreciate on some of these movies where something drastic does happen. I remember it did one time with a helicopter. It killed an actor and a stuntman. They started out with Ben Cross in uniform and gear in the cockpit of the plane. It was in the hangar. We had a big vintage gasoline truck, but it still was pumping gas. We had a guy up on the top of the plane toward the tail, and he was an actual guy from the base. He was in a costume with a Kafia on his head and the whole thing, like the whole crew, the director, and everybody there.

They had the shot set up showing Ben Cross climbing up, getting in the plane, and loading it up with fuel. Then they switched. Ben Cross got out of the cockpit and the pilot got into the cockpit. They planned to have this shot of him actually firing up the jet and taxiing out of the hangar. Everything got set up, they hit the engines and the plane moves forward, but the guy with the fuel tank was still up on the back putting fuel into the plane. When that plane pulled forward, it pulled and tipped that jet engine refueler over. Jet fuel spewed everywhere.

This director is screaming at people. The pilot shut the plane down, but it was just one of those things that all happened in a few seconds. He was screaming at people to get out, because the merest spark would have just... it would just have exploded—the whole hangar, the plane, and everybody there. As it was, it tipped over one of the main cameras and broke the cameraman's leg. It was one of those dumb accidents that if it had gone really wrong, it would have been just disastrous.

It is easy to see. People think that most all of these stunts are just idiot-proof, and they're not always. Things can go wrong and do go wrong. That was a lesson, I'll tell you. For me personally, it was very interesting to do that movie, and that was a lot of fun to do it.

The Cooler was the last one. I also worked on *Honky-tonk* with Clint Eastwood again. There was any number of them in there, and it was an interesting experience. Those films bring money into the community and a certain excitement to know that this is being filmed here. There was a lot of it here for a while.

There was a time, and probably still is to some extent, where a lot of productions went to Canada because the dollar was so much cheaper against our dollar. They could get most of the locales that they would need for

most anything, all the way from one end of Canada to the other. It can look like a Midwest college campus, it can look like the Wild West, it can look like California coastal, so I think a lot of stuff went there.

I do still see that they are occasionally making movies here. In fact, they just finished one, I think, not too long ago with Dakota Fanning.

If I got a call asking, "Hey, can you do this movie," if I possibly could, I would. I didn't get to do *The Bodyguard* and I didn't get to do *Sister Act*, and I was so upset, but I was gone and couldn't change my plans. In fact, one of them, I think, was filmed when we were moving. I really wanted to work those. I love Whoopi Goldberg and Kevin Costner.

When you say that someone just called you up and said, "Are you free?," how did people know you did costumes and wardrobe?

Either from someone from the union, or I was on a list that the Nevada Film Commission kept. Robin Hollaberd used to be the head of that. I think she's retired from that now. Sometimes I would hear that one was coming, and I would call the union and say, "Hey, if you need somebody, I'd love to do it and I'll be available that time." I think as extras we were on a couple of...these local casting places had our names, and so they would call and see if we were available.

The main thing on being an extra is just showing up and staying there for however long it takes to make the shots, whether they need you for three hours or they need you for thirteen hours. Many times they'll shoot something at nine a.m., and then go back and have to re-shoot it at four a.m. Well, if they don't have the same extras...you may only be wallpaper, but you need to be the same wallpaper. [laughs] We were wallpaper in

one scene in *The Cooler*, and walking away from William H. Macy at *Circus Circus* in the arcade in one other scene. I just love watching the artistic process. Call me nuts, but I do.

Were many of the films focused around casinos?

A lot of them were. They would film... some of these older casinos were closed. I know they did some up at the Lake in South Shore, but I really didn't get involved in those. Was it *Misery* with Kathy Bates, where she whacks off the guy's feet?

Yes.

That was filmed in the Genoa area. A film with Walter Matthau was filmed a lot in Genoa. You can see the little museum, the old saloon, and a lot of that little core of Genoa. Some of it's just filmed out in the desert. Some of *Honky-tonk* was filmed in Dayton or Hazen...out there somewhere. Sometimes they just find remote little spots down in Pleasant Valley or Washoe Valley that suits what the director's looking for. It just depends. We used some little old motel downtown for that one for *Melvin and Howard*. A lot of it's done around the casinos because the stories are geared around them. There was the Old Nevada Club...it always seemed like there was one old casino that had just recently closed that you could use. Sometimes they would just clean out one section of a casino, rope it off with security, and you just filmed there.

*Where was *The Cooler* filmed?*

At Circus Circus in their restaurant and the arcade. It was primarily Circus Circus.

In terms of people employed for filming, what is the mix of people that they try to find locally and people that they bring in?

It depends on the production. Very often they'll need anything from one to four or five wardrobe people. They always bring in their core crew—their gaffers, their head wardrobe lady, and their head makeup people. If you are doing a lot of people...I knew a couple friends that did that parting-of-the-seas scene in Cecil B. DeMille's *Moses* or one of those ones where he parted the Red Sea. They filmed it out at Pyramid Lake, way back in the fifties or early sixties, when he is leading the people out of whatever...that hoards of people and that desert was all out at Pyramid.

They would bring their core people, and you have local electricians and carpenters to build sets, change sets, add facades, take away, take down, modernize, or take it back in time. Whatever they would need for wardrobe, whether it was one, three, four, five, or more.... Not too often did they do makeup or hair, unless it was just for extras. You needed somebody to make sure that, if it was a western, you didn't see somebody with the long ironed hair that is so popular today. They would make sure that somebody did something with that. You were responsible for making sure that the village girl that worked the bar or the shop didn't have on diamonds out to here, bracelets to there, and big earrings. A lot of times extras wouldn't think of that.

The craft services...you feed your people. There is always a craft wagon there that has fruit, yogurt, doughnuts, and coffee going all day long. Most movies would then provide appropriate meals. If you were there through lunch, they provided lunch. If you were there through dinner, again, then they provided

dinner. So there was always caterers and whoever did craft services here that would benefit from that.

From motel and hotel rooms, to buying meals out, to picking up odds and ends that they need—shoes or Band-aids...I mean, in a million different ways, like getting things done at the cleaners, going to the Laundromat and doing a pile of laundry every day, or just hiring drivers—that was another biggie.... If you had to transport people like extras, or rent trucks for the westerns with horses, somebody to wrangle them, somebody that knows how to ride them, and somebody to truck them in and out... it just filters down. There is a lot of money in having movies come and just do everything—stopping off at the grocery store and getting this and that....I remember for *Steal the Sky*, they did this...I think it was in April, and you know what April can be like.

Of course, this was supposed to have been taking place in Israel. They came and it was probably one of those days when it was 70 or 80 degrees, and everybody said, “Oh, this is great.” It did just exactly what it is doing right now. It got colder than cold, the wind came up like a son of a gun, it spit snow, and nobody except for locals had anything to keep themselves warm. People were up there either outside or in this unheated hangar. They also built a little Russian compound area. We had all these languages going that nobody could... Iraqi over here, Russian over there, and Israeli over here.

Anyway, people were absolutely freezing to death. People had to be out in it, because they were filming jets landing and taking off, aerial combats scenes, and Russians running from here to there into the compound and out of the compound.

So they got...I believe it was Bobo's that somebody got a hold of. They went into

their storage and drug out every coat, pair of gloves, boots, scarf, hat—anything they could find—and loaded it all into a great big van and brought it up there. They made a killing. I think they sold out to the last pair of gloves. It was snowing in some of these scenes, and they were saying, “Well, we can't go until the snow quits.” They couldn't film because it was supposed to be filming in Israel.

In one scene in that movie, if you kind of know where to look you might think, “Oh, that is kind of hazy over there,” It wasn't haze. That was snow. [laughter] So, funny stuff and interesting stuff....

It's funny, because I like to read credits at the end of a movie, and it's amazing sometimes the people I see. Somebody that maybe was just a junior director is now moved up a notch, two or three, or stuntmen, drivers, or somebody from makeup. You remember the names and the people and every once in a while you see them in the credits. I think, “oh, good, they're still employed.” [laughs]

Does Reno actively try to get films to come and film here?

I suppose they are, but that is more at a state level. I don't know who took over for Robin nor why there aren't as many movies as there were. I don't know whether it is just there isn't the cooperation or there isn't the incentive. Maybe they make a monetary incentive of some sort... whether it is just Hollywood and they're doing things differently, I really don't know. I know they do a fair amount of movies and TV, too, in Vegas. If they want the really big fancy casinos, they go to Las Vegas for that.

I understand that way back in the day in the thirties, when they were making these Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland-type movies

and they were all college students, they needed a college building or two...a campus with big old trees so that they looked like they were in St. Louis. They would come and film up here at UNR because the old Quad looks just like a campus out of New Jersey, St. Louis, or someplace. Back in the day when *The Misfits* was filmed here, there was quite a history of movies that were made here.

Independence Day with the aliens...oh, my god, they stole the hangars that nobody knew existed out there in the middle of nowhere between Wells and Wendover. In the scenes when they were gathering all the RVs...everybody was gathering and they were doing their thing and everybody was flying everything from crop dusters to jets. It was all filmed out there. I don't know how the heck they found that many people to go out there and be extras, but they did.

How has Reno been portrayed in these films?

Some portrayals haven't been very favorable. *Reno 911* just irks the living daylights out of a lot of people from Reno. They will say, "Well, my friend lives in Reno," People will ask, "Well, is it really like that out there?"

I will say, "Come on. Get real. Sure—our deputies run around in short shorts so short that their underwear is showing, and the female officers are hanging out of their tops."

I will have to say my son-in-law is a deputy... he is still a deputy, but he does forensics and CSI stuff. He said, "Honest to god, some of the funny stuff..." He enjoyed the show because he said, "A lot of the funny stuff that happened is stuff that happens. You cannot believe the stuff that is truly funny that happens out there. Let's face it, criminals are not exactly the brightest people on the face of the earth. Some of the dumbest stuff they do

is just hysterical." I mean, it can be dangerous, but there is an awful lot of funny stuff that happens. So he enjoyed seeing...he said, "I can probably give them thirty suggestions for storylines from stuff that has happened..." just to him or his partners when they were out there on patrol.

The rest of it, I think didn't do Reno any good. When they portray the rundown motels, crime, some of the lower-end skuzzy-looking areas of the city, and some of the older rundown casinos, that doesn't do Reno any good. Publicity is publicity, but you don't want the area portrayed in a way that it is not someplace you'd want to go or be at.

I think some of it has benefited the area, and others have not. When you're looking at the money it brings in and the jobs that it creates.... A lot of times when they give their okay to a movie, they are not exactly sure what the content of the film is and what the finished product is going to be. You either take it as it is or you just don't take it. I would say it's probably a tossup.

Tell me about the work that you've done for the Philharmonic.

Oh, it has not been a lot. For three or four Christmases, when they have had the big show, they have had it at the Pioneer and also at the Grand Sierra, on the stage where *Hello Hollywood* used to be. That is always a treat to have an excuse to do anything back there, because it is home. They would always have a vignette in the beginning of getting the conductor out, introducing him or her, and then a little party scene. I was always part of that—three or four of us just assisting the magician, or greeting people to the party and having them come stand around the tree.

My husband, Gary, was Santa Claus. So we have a wonderful...in fact, it was on the

front page of the Life section this Christmas—advertising for their Christmas show this year. They did downsize on the show, and Gary was not Santa Claus. I don't even know if they had one.

I took a picture the year before of their new conductor, Laura Jackson, sitting on Santa's lap. I had given her a copy of that, and they used that in the newspaper. The year before that, Michael, our conductor, came back and conducted that particular Christmas show. He talked to Gary ahead of time. Santa Claus was out there, and it was a sing-along thing with the orchestra. Gary was saying, "Come, sing along, sing along. Come on. This is 'White Christmas.' Everybody sing along."

Michael walked over and handed him the baton. Gary went over to the podium and conducted the rest of the orchestra playing "White Christmas." Of course, Michael was standing behind him and off to the side, but it looked for all the world like Santa Claus conducting "White Christmas." The audience loved it. He got the biggest kick out of it, and it just was a lot of fun.

A lot of those people I see doing the Opera orchestra are familiar faces. "Hi, how are you doing?" I overheard a comment one time... they have a mass choir from different churches and UNR to create this big seventy-five- or hundred-person choir. I heard somebody say, "How many opera people are here this time?"

They said, "Oh, I don't know. Probably about seven to nine."

They said, "Oh, good, because that is like having thirty or forty more," people with these opera-trained voices are trained to be able to be heard at the back of a theater without a microphone. I had to laugh at that. That was a good one.

I haven't done a lot with the Phil, by any means, but I think they're a great group. They're a wonderful benefit to the community.

What general changes to the cultural landscape have you seen in Reno? What developments have you seen?

I would like to have seen more development. When you consider that I've been doing something with entertainment here since 1972, I don't feel that in that forty years...mind you, I was gone for nine years, but in that forty-year span, I don't see that there has been as much development in the cultural side as I would like to have seen. We got the Nevada Museum of Art and Bruka Theater has been going along doing their thing, which is great. Reno Little Theater lost their theater, though, and so that was a devastating blow. The Opera is struggling, and the Reno Philharmonic is doing their thing. We have the Reno Chamber Orchestra and the Reno Band. I can't speak to the Museum much, or artists. I think having the Artists Loft in the old Riverside Hotel as a facility for artists to live in at a reasonable cost and have their studios is wonderful.

I can't compare it to other cities because I haven't lived there per se. St. Louis is so much bigger that you can't compare nearly 4 million people to 500,000 people. It just doesn't compute. I just feel Reno to some degree has stagnated.

There was always a lot of egos that would get in the way of things, and I just find that deplorable. You have a common goal. If you want to get to here, then everybody should just get behind that movement, get along, put their ego in their suitcase, and work toward achieving that goal. That is part of the reason why I think the Lear Theater has never gotten anywhere. Nobody could ever agree on what it was to be used for. Nobody could agree how to raise the money. There are all these entities...I won't go into names, but they are so busy protecting their little kingdom that things don't get done.

Maybe I'm too much out of the loop, and there is more getting done than I think there is, but I don't see it. Of course, the economic slowdown has just kicked the teeth out of every entity—every entity, let alone the arts. That is something we'll just have to struggle along with. Hopefully most everything will survive and at some point be able to build up again. I just really don't feel that it has come along like it should.

Part of that, too, is gaming. There are these shows, and when tourists come to town, for the most part that is what they're going to do. They're not going to go. There will be the few.... We do get people from Sacramento, from Roseville, and from around the Lake. We get people to attend as far as the Opera is concerned. For the most part, though, a lot of these communities have their own little community theater, and so they don't come here for that. You have to depend on the locals for it.

I know back in the old theater days, there was an awful lot of egos getting in the way of being able to go forward and doing things. "Well, I'm going to go off and start my own theater group." Well, good, we wish you well. What can we do to help? Instead people, "Oh, if you go over and audition for him, then, by god, don't come back here." What is that? That's shoot-yourself-in-the-foot stuff.

It saddens me, and I just hope things get better. All we can do is, as people who are interested in the arts, work to try to make it better, and that is where I sit.

GARY HOWELL

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me about where you were born and where you grew up?

Gary Howell: I was born in Leon, Iowa in 1939. I grew up all over the Midwest. My father worked as a migratory lineman during the Depression. He worked for quite a few companies, eventually ending up at Western Union. So, I grew up in Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Missouri. A good Midwest upbringing. I attended twelve schools before I graduated from high school in Des Moines.

Tell me about your mom.

My mother was born in 1919 in Mitchell, South Dakota. She grew up and graduated high school in Council Bluffs, Iowa. She and my father got married in 1938. She worked for the majority of her life as a secretary for various firms. She always wanted to be a librarian and never did. She loved to read.

Do you remember any art, music, or theater programs in the schools you attended?

No. I really don't until high school. I just remember that there were drama classes and school plays in high school. At the time, I was not very interested and didn't attend these.

What kind of activities did you do with your family?

My father and I played catch quite a bit. I remember that. We went to parks. We always made outings. It seems like we always had a summer vacation where we went somewhere. I particularly remember a trip that we made through the South. I remember going to Little Rock. I was about ten or eleven, and I think what was most memorable about that was it was a very hot day and I wanted to go swimming. It was the first time I ever encountered a whites-only and blacks-only swimming pool. I was really intrigued by the whole thing. The whites-only was full, so I couldn't go swimming.

Can you tell me about college and your career before you came to Reno?

I don't have a college degree. I attended college classes in quite a few different places—two years in Des Moines at a junior college, University of Minnesota, Duval University in Quebec, State University of New York, and Missouri WNCC. I've taken classes in a lot of places. I never quite tried to put them all together. They were just classes in things I was interested in.

I went to work for Western Union in 1959, in Minneapolis. Actually, my first job was in St. Paul, Minnesota. That was in a day and age when you bid on jobs and seniority got the job. You got the jobs by seniority and gradually worked your way up. I went from St. Paul to Minneapolis, to a relief position where I was doing vacation reliefs all over North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. I did that for about a year. Then, we went to Omaha, Nebraska. We were in Omaha for five or six years. I worked in the fledgling computer industry with Western Union.

I worked at SAC headquarters in Omaha, and following that, I went the Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks, Alaska. I went to a missile site in northern Quebec. That was kind of interesting. We lived up there for about three and a half years. I have three daughters, and they attended the Department of National Defense schools in northern Quebec. All our neighbors spoke French. The girls became quite bilingual. Of course, all but my oldest daughter forgot it all.

From there, I went to Syracuse, from Syracuse to St. Louis, and from St. Louis to here. That was in 1972.

What kind of cultural activities were you involved in before moving to Reno?

My wife was the one who was much more interested in theater. She did theater in high school. I guess I would have to say, up until we came to Reno, I was just a willing participant, in that I lugged, carried, and attended.

I never really got involved in theater until we came to Reno. Reno Little Theater needed some bit players for one of the plays they were putting on, and I got talked into doing it by David Hettich, the director. I did it and enjoyed it. From that point on, it seemed like I was very involved in Reno Little Theater. During a ten- to twelve-year period, I acted, did stagecraft, worked onstage, did scenery, did sound, did lights, and kind of got involved in the whole thing. That was the start of my involvement in theater.

How long were you in Reno before you became involved in Reno Little Theater?

I moved here in 1972 and the first play I was involved in was 1973.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first arrived? Had you spent any time in Reno before moving here?

No. I spent time in the Marine Corps in California, and that was my first exposure to the West Coast. Nevada is different than California, and it was kind of a new and different experience. I was really intrigued with the dryness and the rockiness. It was pretty. I really enjoyed it. I have to say, we've lived a lot of places; I've seen a lot of things, and I appreciate seeing different places and different things. Reno is just different and I enjoyed it.

Do you remember some of the productions you were involved in at Reno Little Theater?

Yes, I do. *Spaford*, was the first play that I was in. I also did *Three-Cornered Moon*, which was a revival of the very first play that had been put on by Reno Little Theater. It was directed by Blythe Bulman, who was the star of the original production in 1936 or 1937. Blythe was a neat gal. She was a retired teacher from Reno High.

Another production I remember is *Amadeus*. That was a great show. I wasn't in it, but I remember it was a great show. I really enjoyed seeing that. It was done at Reno Little Theater and directed by Bernardi, along with *A Little Night Music*. I always liked musicals. Musicals are very expensive for an amateur theater company to produce, and so Reno Little Theater didn't really produce that many.

I was on the Play Reading Committee for four or five years, and I also served on the board. On Play Reading Committee, I remember we read a lot of plays. Trying to get people to come to theater was funny. We always had a rule—you had to have at least one Neil Simon every season. People come to comedies. They don't particularly like to come to dramas. What you hear is people come to be entertained; they don't come to think. I always liked dramas myself.

Besides thinking about what plays would draw audiences in, were there other considerations to take into account when choosing plays?

Yes. You had to consider audience appeal and who would come. Also, you would try to do things that would broaden the horizons of the theater and the theater-going audience in general. We used the downstairs as an experimental theater to put on some avant-garde things at the time. You've got to realize this is the 1970s and 1980s.

What was avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s?

When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder was one of them. I remember some of the plays, but I can't really remember the names. I remember it was more experimental with language being used and things like that. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was reluctance by the community at large to accept a lot of things. I remember seeing *Equus* at the university and was impressed at the courage of actually putting it on.

Was Equus well attended?

Equus was sold out, as far as I remember. It was a great play. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was another we did and the university did. Again, that's a pretty intense drama. On the Play Reading Committee, besides trying to expand horizons and get a mix, we also tried some of the new plays by playwrights that weren't well known. I remember we did a play by the guy that wrote *City of Trembling Leaves*, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, a Reno author. It was called *Cry of the Cat* [*The Track of the Cat*] or something like that. I can remember a lot of plays. It's funny; I can picture them in my mind easier than I can remember the titles.

Can you describe the venue where Reno Little Theater was located at the time?

Reno Little Theater had its own theater. It is where the Circus Circus parking garage is now, on Sierra Street. I still don't quite understand how that came about. Reno Little Theater was originally in the Dania Hall building, and Dania Hall was a Danish organization. They did not sell it to Reno Little Theater; they gave it to Reno Little Theater for one dollar, under the condition it would always be used as an auditorium or a theater. I'm not quite sure how it wound up being a

parking garage. I know that the board and trustees of Reno Little Theater didn't want to give it up, but somehow or other they wound up having to and they got paid for it. Of course, you can never get paid enough for an old building that's been replaced with a functioning theater. They're still going through the struggles of trying to open their own space; hopefully they're on the way to doing that.

Down on Cheney? It's close to Wells.

On Cheney. I sure hope that they get it done. To my knowledge, they are the oldest performing group in the state of Nevada.

What was the Reno Little Theater building like as a venue when you were volunteering? Was it functional?

It was very functional. It was a very old brick building with a basement. The audience floor was raked, rather than the stage. It had a fairly deep stage so you could hang three or four curtains and drops. Everything was mechanical. It had pin rails at both sides and a very shallow side stage. It had a stage manager's booth which was something that was used in early theater but is not convention anymore. It was visible immediately right off the stage right. It had a shop behind, where scenery could be constructed.

It had a fairly good-sized basement, part of which was used as a lounge for social functions and meet-and-greets afterwards. Part of the downstairs was also used as an experimental theater in the round. There's also makeup. The two dressing rooms were downstairs. It was a nice venue with lots of character.

Was it haunted?

I think so. [laughter] I can remember a few nights when I locked up. You'd be the last one out, and you'd be shining lights out after you as you came back up from downstairs. You just kind of got that feeling like "I can't get out of here quick enough."

I think it always felt like that. It always felt spooky. It seemed like a very happy place when there were lots of people there, but when you were there by yourself, it was spooky.

How many other volunteers and performers were involved?

It seemed like there was a core or cadre of people that were there. David Hettich was the managing director when we first got there and for quite a few years afterwards. Don and Joan Long were very active. There were probably twenty to thirty people that were very active who kind of rotated in and out. There were always young people. It seemed like there were always young people from university getting involved. Of the older people that had been around a long time, there were probably thirty. It seemed like I was constantly meeting people from the previous generation.

You've mentioned David Hettich and Blythe Bulman. Do you remember other people who were part of that core?

Don Long and Joan Long. Buzz High and his wife [Joanne High]. She was the lead in *A Little Night Music* and did a great job. I remember them because they had matching 1959 Cadillacs. [laughs] They were probably ten to fifteen years older than we were.

Diana Carter is someone who's still very involved. When we first started going, she was a teenager the same age as my daughters are now, and was in a lot of children's productions with them. She has been chairman of the

board off and on. She was a savior of Reno Little Theater when it got kicked out of its building, and in the various stages when they were at Hug High and going forth with the new building. I know that she finally stepped down as chairman of the board, and I don't blame her. You get burned out after so many years of things like that. She is still heavily involved in Reno Little Theater, though.

Jim Cashell directed quite a few productions. In fact, I was in at least two or three plays that he directed. He liked to direct period pieces, like *Gas Light* and *Little Foxes*. I was in *Little Foxes*. I didn't play Big Daddy, but I played Gooper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Happy Birthday, Wanda June, now, there's an avant-garde piece for you. It's a Kurt Vonnegut play. It's about a Hemingway-type character that's been lost in the jungle for seven years and comes back to find his wife about ready to remarry and a son that he doesn't know. To celebrate his coming back, they buy a cake from a bakery, and the only one that's available says "Happy Birthday, Wanda June," which is for a little girl that got run over by an ice cream truck. [laughs] That's kind of the tenor of the whole play. It's a Kurt Vonnegut dark comedy. During the whole play, he's haunted by ghosts of his past.

What was a typical season like in terms of the number of plays and when you would have the productions?

Productions were generally about two months apart with six weeks for the rehearsal. Typically we would have two comedies, one drama, hopefully one musical, and a couple other pieces to be filled in.

I remember Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians*. I was Inspector Blore, a phony South African inspector that had been involved in wrongfully sending somebody to prison. It

was fun. I have a lot of good memories of Reno Little Theater.

Generally how well attended were the productions when you were involved?

The theater had seats for about 420, and, of course, comedies are always better attended than the dramas. A Neil Simon would pretty well sell out and we'd have about six performances. We always had a Sunday afternoon matinee. The dramas probably had 50 percent attendance, with average audiences of 250 or so. For the type of venue, it was pretty well attended.

Theater in the round, when we had it downstairs, had seating capacity of about 100, and it was usually sold out. We only did about two weekends on the theater in the round. We'd do things like *The Adams Chronicles* downstairs. *The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia*, is a play about the last four Confederate veterans that belong to the KKK in some little town, and they were the last four that were still attending. It's just a funny old play.

How would you describe the quality of the productions?

It was mixed. Having seen lots of different theaters in lots of different venues, I would say that it was probably a good university level. Again, a lot depended on the director and the cast, but for the most part, it was a good university level. I was always amazed at the musicals that we could mount and the talent that we would draw into musicals. Overall, quality was quite good.

Are there any productions that stand out in your mind as being especially good or especially bad?

Especially good, especially bad. [laughs] I'm trying to think of the especially bad category. Some of the comedies were just kind of silly, but audiences seem to love those.

Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* was especially good. I really liked that. I thought that was a good production.

I played Cortez, in *The Rising Sun* or something like that. It's the capture of Atahualpa and the conquest of the Incas. It's a very touching play. It was very good.

I was in *Little Foxes*. I did not particularly think that *Little Foxes* was that good of a play. Lillian Hellman is very talky. The subject matter is extreme indeed. Jim Cashell directed it, and he loves period pieces. From a costuming point of view, it was terrific. As a play, I thought it was kind of deadly.

Were there any roles that you particularly enjoyed playing, that have stuck with you over the years?

I don't know if anything's really stuck with me over the years. There were some that I really enjoyed. I enjoyed playing Cortez in *The Rising Sun*. I always liked comedies. I liked *Ten Little Indians*. I liked *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. I really enjoyed a lot of parts that I played while I was doing them. There were some that were just plain hard work and took a lot of time. Anybody's that involved in theater knows that when you can commit your life to a production, you pretty well put your life on hold for six to eight weeks while you're in rehearsals learning your lines. Everything else kind of takes a back seat, and it's really kind of a funny state. When you get involved in more than two or more productions in a year, it really gets all-consuming. I remember I did that for a couple of years, and I was glad to not do it.

I also enjoyed playing Inspector Lastrade in a Sherlock Holmes play.

Jerry Johnson is another person I remember who was involved in plays. He did a two-person play and the actors were playing broadcasters from a radio station. It was funny.

Can you describe the sources of revenue for Reno Little Theater?

Like any theater group, Reno Little Theater depended, in large part, on its angels. There was a fundraising committee. It was something that I absolutely did not and do not like and was never really that much involved in. I know that probably 30 percent of our annual budget had to come from either fundraising or grants. I remember it was a big deal when we were able to secure either a state grant or a federal grant for some particular projects.

I remember we put on *The Adams Chronicles* and took that on the road. We played in various high schools throughout northern Nevada. I can remember doing crazy things because I was doing the lights for it. I think it was in Fernley High School where I needed 220 to light up the light cube, and they didn't have anything available except the dishwasher. So, I hooked up the 220 to the dishwasher to get the power for the light cube in the auditorium. It was probably a 50-foot run. I had to run cables all the way from the kitchen into the auditorium. It was interesting, to say the least.

I also remember Battle Mountain. When we were in Battle Mountain, they must have made it mandatory for the middle-school kids to come to the performances. They had a snack bar open the entire time, and when the kids wanted something, they would just

get up. Since we were doing theater in the round, they'd just walk across the stage to get their snacks. [laughs] It was very interesting taking it on the road. Some places were very appreciative and very nice. With other places, it was almost like, "Why did you invite us?"

Can you describe The Adams Chronicle?

It's about the same thing that the book is based on. It's John Adams' letters to his wife. It's basically a play of their life. It's a good, solid, patriotic play about "family values," questioning styles of government, and Federalist versus Republican ideals in terms of how we want our government to operate.

It's a good educational play for high schools. For anybody that hasn't read the book, there's an excellent TV series out on it. Paul Giamatti played John Adams.

It was really good. I enjoyed it. I learned a lot about—

You learn a lot about the historical facts of the time and things we take for granted. You think of things like travel, and you understand that it took a lot longer then, but there's a lot of little things that don't even occur to you that would be such inconveniences then, but aren't now.

Absolutely. Did the community generally embrace Reno Little Theater?

It's funny. We always felt like we were competing with the casinos for entertainment. Generally, the more entertainment you have, the better off you are because it stimulates entertainment in general. In our case, though, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was so much entertainment available in the casinos—in

either main stage or small venues—that you really competed. I remember our ticket prices were ridiculously low. At the time, they were six or seven dollars. At the same time, for that value we were still competing with stuff on the stage. Look how expensive it is to go to a show now. Of course, casinos have swung away from doing a lot of the type of things they did then. They are now going to big-name venues and they'll turn around and charge fifty dollars and up to see some main-stage star. It's too bad. I guess things evolve.

What type of audience did Reno Little Theater attract?

We had a core group of people who were on our rolls that came. We always sent out mailings every season on the upcoming season to try to get season ticket sales. The core was probably a lot of college people and a lot of educators—upper middle class. I don't know. It's the type of people that are interested in arts. Generally, the same people will come to a play that will go to a concert, that will go to an opera. They each have their favorite venues, but the type of people that are interested in arts in general will go to other arts.

Maximum seating at Reno Little Theater was about 400; maximum seating at the Pioneer [Center for the Performing Arts] for an opera is about 2,000, and yet for the size of community we have, either one struggles to fill an auditorium. I guess it's easier just to be lazy and stay home and watch TV.

Have you seen a decrease in audience attendance from the 1970s and 1980s compared to the 2000s?

Yes. I think it's more of a change in demographics. You're getting fewer young

people involved in a lot of the arts and theater, with the exception of the youngsters that go into theater. In general, I think you go to a lot of the arts venues and the audiences are notably grayer than they used to be; they're older. I don't know if that trend is going to continue, but I notice it.

What are the responsibilities of the Reno Little Theater board?

There are the various committees—the Play Reading, the actual running of the business of the theater, the financial decisions, the selection of the season, and everything involved with trying to keep the theater viable. Like most organizations of that type, if you're on the board, it's generally considered that you're on a working board; you have to be doing something. You have to be serving on something. You have to actively be working on stage or in fundraising or financial. I think that's pretty well true of most groups.

Was there a particular committee that you focused on as a board member or did you do a mix of things?

I did a mix of things—Financial, Play Reading [Committee]. Like I said, I hate fundraising. Larry Kirk was the mainstay of the technical aspect of Reno Little Theater. He is still around Reno.

Reno Little Theater had two types of lighting. The lighting downstairs had the old, mechanical, single-gang relay switches with handles you would throw to activate certain circuits. It was old school—1920s, 1930s electronics. I learned they also had a programmable cube which you could program light changes to.

I also used, operated, and worked on lighting when I was in at the community

college in St. Louis where Donna worked. I did lighting there and it's the same type of thing. It's the type of lighting that was the next generation and is old school now.

Things have evolved just like computers have evolved. You have movable lights and automatic color changers and those types of things which were not available [in the past], and for the most part, are still not available to anybody that doesn't have a lot of money. Single-lens lighting fixtures with gels that you can use for color changes and set patterns—especially if you can use computerized programs to do the light changes—are still perfectly acceptable in most cases. It's when you get into some of the fancier shows that you need a lot of the special effects, the spinning lights and the movable light instruments.

I was involved in the lighting at the community college where Donna worked for four or five years. That was a very good experience working with kids their age range. Children's Theater was ages nine to nineteen, though they probably had a few younger than that. It was a nice experience. They put on amazingly good performances.

Was this the programmable cube lighting system?

Yes.

When you were living in St. Louis, was this during the interim from—

The two times we lived in Reno, yes. We lived here from 1972 to 1992, then we came back in 2001. We were gone for nine years.

In general, what did you enjoy about being involved in Reno Little Theater?

The people you're involved with. Theatrical people are interesting people and they're fun to be around. The spontaneity of what they do and how they do it, and the enjoyment that they take from it creates a fun experience. That's the main thing.

The business aspects of it are probably not as much fun. Trying to learn your lines is definitely not fun. The performance is fun, but the main enjoyment I got was just from being around the people.

Was it expected of you, or was there a reason you decided to take on more responsibilities?

No. I guess it's just a case of me being there. By nature, I'm the kind of person that gets involved in the mechanics and management of things, and it needed to be done.

Did you see any changes in Reno Little Theater during the time you were involved?

Oh, yes. David Hettich retired. That was one of the biggest changes. David Hettich had been a force in the theater for a long time. He retired and we went through a series of different supervising directors the next few years. By its nature, that just changes the flavor of what you're doing.

Like I said, we were here from 1972 to 1992. After Donna went to work in *Hello, Hollywood*—especially since she was working nights—we probably cut our involvement with Reno Little Theater five years before we left. It was the mid-1980s, I would say. We gradually got less involved.

How did Reno Little Theater change when David Hettich left?

I'll put it this way; I think people at the university are very familiar with [James]

Bernardi. Imagine the theater pre-Bernardi and post-Bernardi. When you talk about theater groups, you definitely think of the people who are running the group at the time. They put a stamp and character on what's going on, not only with productions, but with the group. It becomes their theater. I don't think they become dictatorial, but, in order to keep a bunch of artists working together towards a common goal, you need somebody that's a fairly strong personality. People like Bernardi and David Hettich definitely were. The things you do and the way you do them are the way [the director] would like them done. So, yes, it does change.

Is there anything I haven't asked you about Reno Little Theater that would be important to include?

I really hope that they're able to get their own theater going and get the place in the sun again.

Gary, did you notice any changes in general or culturally in Reno when you returned?

Yes. There were a lot of changes in Reno. I remember in 1972, when we first came here, Reno-Sparks had less than 150,000 people. It was a much smaller community and with a much smaller flavor—more of a cow town than it is now. From when we left to when we came back, the biggest thing that I noticed was all the empty spaces seemed to have been filled in. As Reno has grown geographically, it has spread out. It seemed it was open fields [when we left]. Now, all those empty fields, for the most part, are filled in. That's the first thing I noticed.

In terms of arts, Reno Little Theater definitely changed a lot from when I left and when we came back. When we left, Reno

Little Theater still had its own building; it was still a viable theater in its own facility, with a specified audience. When they lost the theater, they lost a lot of their audience.

I don't have anything in particular against casinos, but I think the whole Silver Legacy thing changed the flavor of downtown Reno. The casino element used to be primarily built around Harrah's, the Cal Neva, and that whole core of old-type casinos with the stage venues. The Silver Legacy is one of the more modern facilities, and while they have stage venues, they're different. There's a different flavor now and different attractions for different people.

There are a lot of changes. Part of it is just geographical; part of it is the flavor of the town; part of it is just that there are a lot more people here.

I also think the proportion of native Nevadans is much smaller, and that's changed the flavor of our location quite a bit. When we say "pride in Reno," it means a different thing than it did back when. Back when, it meant a lot of pride in a lot of cultural activities. Now, it's pride in—what? Sports? It's just different.

How did you get involved in the Nevada Opera?

Obviously through Donna. [laughs] Donna took the job in the Opera. I've always loved classical music. I can't say that I've always loved opera per se. I like classical music. Opera is an art form that you really have to learn to appreciate. Anybody can sit and listen to certain music and appreciate the value of the music. To appreciate opera as an art form takes a bit of doing. You have to try. Like they say, in a good opera, the soprano dies in the second act, and if you're lucky, the tenor does too. [laughs] It's just a different art form. The storytelling that opera comes from, particularly when you look at the 17th and 18th centuries, is a different thing and

different values meant different things than they do now. So, with a lot of the operas, if you went strictly for the story, you probably wouldn't stick around. Great opera is great opera, though.

Donna primarily does costumes, so I was doing the toting and the loading for her. Through her, I've always been somewhat involved in the technical aspect of theater, in terms of the electrical, lighting, and sound. I guess the costuming aspect of it wore off on me because I was around her enough. I actually got involved to the point where I had wardrobe, not only with the Opera, but with various other shows, too. I've done Broadway shows that have come to town, which is fun. I love Broadway shows.

I had a great experience working *Mama Mia*. I was the principal male dresser for the four male leads. They were great guys and it was a fun piece of music to listen to. It was just fun.

Primarily, my involvement was just because I was around it.

What was your first involvement with the Opera?

The first thing I started doing for the Opera was helping Donna tote and carry boxes and crates of costumes. I'd go places and pick things up, haul them, pack them, and put them away.

In my work as a stagehand, I worked a couple of operas, doing electrics, lighting, or carpentry. That was just as the calls came through, because I signed up through the stagehands union. Principally, with the Opera, it's been that type of thing.

I have also done some extra work as a supernumerary, in non-singing, non-speaking roles—sometimes speaking a little bit, but not much. That's fun. You're just

around. I enjoy being around the people in the music. It's just fun.

How big a group works with the Nevada Opera?

Of the group that's around, there are thirty very dedicated people, up to fifty somewhat dedicated people, and another ten or so that drift in and out. It's a relatively small cadre of people that do that.

The chorus, of course, is the heart of the Opera, and they are very dedicated people that hang in there. They have to do tons of things—have to learn to sing in a language they don't understand, learn stage directions—and they do it for the love of opera.

Is the chorus generally made up of local people?

They're all local people. The chorus is, like a lot of groups, getting older, but there has been quite an infusion of new young people particularly from the university, that have become involved in the Opera. Opera has a dying need to have younger people get involved in the costuming and some technical aspects of the theater. Donna and her crew are getting a little long in the tooth, and they need to have some people that will pick up the reins and start to be interested and involved in the costuming aspect of the Opera.

I saw an article in the paper the other day about a theater group that does things without costuming, without sets, without anything. It's just spoken lines on the stage. While I think that's an interesting thing to do, I appreciate going to theater or opera for the visual aspects as well as the other things. Costuming is important; the music is important. I think the story is secondary.

What does it take to put on an opera?

Generally opera productions, particularly if they're 17th or 18th century period pieces, involve ballrooms and courtroom scenes—things that are big and take a lot of scenery. If you don't have the actual scenery, you have to have the backdrops painted on things that you drop.

I can tell you personally that when I was working as a carpenter, we did load-ins which would take two to three days for a ten-man crew to load in and set up the scenery. It's massive and obviously very expensive. You can do it on the cheap, but I think people go to the opera for the whole experience. You have [to consider] that aspect.

You also have lighting. Lighting is very important, especially when you're shifting focus on people. You can't have general lighting; you have to have highlighted lighting on people as they sing solos and make entrances. Lighting is very important. Also, lighting is very important for mood-setting and times of day. That's part of the whole experience, and that's quite expensive. When you look at the lighting instrument by itself, it's quite costly. A single simple lighting instrument can be \$1,000 to \$2,000. Then, you consider that you need a couple hundred of those. You then have to design the lighting and set that all up.

Sound is obviously very important. You have to be able to hear the opera everywhere. The Pioneer is a good theater, but, quite frankly, you have trouble hearing in the auditorium without enhanced sound.

The other aspect is people really enjoy the board where they can read English translations of the foreign language. That's part of the whole experience. It takes quite a bit of programming and an experienced operator to operate that board.

When you stop and think about how much it takes for lighting, sound, everything

else... just think of the amount of cables. Cables come in buckets. There are probably twenty buckets of cables that need to be run over and under the stage, just to get the proper electronics from one place to another. That's a major thing just by itself.

How do you change a courtroom scene into somebody's house or into a reception hall? Actually, those things are flown in. They hang the scenery that goes along with [each scene] on bars, drop it in, and pull it out. That's an art form all by itself. Somebody very clever has to design all that in order to entirely change what the stage looks like during one scene to what the stage looks like during another. It just takes a lot of work, a lot of manpower, and a lot of money.

Generally how many operas per year has Nevada Opera performed?

Generally, Reno has been putting on three main-stage productions plus a smaller venue, generally around Christmastime. Then there are the things they do in the summertime. The answer is basically four productions each year plus something smaller.

You said there were six to eight weeks of preparation leading up to performances at Reno Little Theater. How much time is required for Nevada Opera?

When I said six to eight weeks, that was rehearsal time. You have to stop and think: What are we going to put on? How are we going to do it? Who are we going to get to direct it? How are we going to stage it? Who are the actors or performers that we're going to get?

You also have to have all the tryouts. You have to do the matching. All of that takes a considerable amount of time before the six

or eight weeks of what we call rehearsal time. From the time you make a decision that you're actually going to do something until the time you actually get it done, you're probably looking at a two-month period.

Then, in either case—Reno Little Theater or Opera—you get down to that six or eight weeks' worth of rehearsal. That's after you've already selected the people, held the tryouts, said who's going to do what roles, and decided how you are going to stage it and light it.

Then you have that period of eight of actually refining it. That eight-week period is primarily people learning their roles, learning how to do the things they do when they're singing their song or speaking, and doing the staging. Generally, they don't get on the stage until the week before the performance actually goes on.

Most of the rehearsals are done in remote venues someplace else. You have to simulate approximate distances in the "I will make five steps across to here," or, "I'll turn and face this way to this person." You have to have some kind of setup where you're saying, "We think this is the way it's going to be on the stage when we get there." Quite often, especially if you're working with different levels, there may be steps that you have to climb up and different stage flats, and you have to simulate that when you're in rehearsals.

From start to finish, you're probably looking at at least a three-and-a-half-month period between the conception [of the idea] and putting it on.

Is that a similar situation for Reno Little Theatre?

It's a similar process. Obviously the more elaborate it is, the more time and planning go into it, but you still have to go through the same thing; What are we going to put

on? How are we going to stage it? How are we going to light it? What are the technical aspects? Who's going to direct it? Who's going to be in it? How do we do the tryouts? How do we match this performer to that performer?

It's all the same thing; it's just that the complexities of different things are added into it, depending on what you do. Obviously, some verse is spoken. You have to consider people's singing voices as well. It's a similar process, though.

For your involvement in the Nevada Opera, how much time do you have to get everything ready?

Generally the sets are rented for an opera. They come in on a semi truck, generally full. You unload it and stack it. The stage manager will put in some kind of "This is the way it's going to be assembled." Some things can be pre-built; some things can't. As a stagehand, I always got forty to fifty hours' worth of work on the load-in, bringing things in and getting them set up. For the people that actually work in the show, there's probably another twenty hours immediately preceding when they actually get things put into place. You're looking at a considerable amount of time.

What are some of the productions you remember working on for Nevada Opera?

Tosca, Madame Butterfly, Pagliacci, L'elisir d'amore, Elixir of Love.

Can you describe Pioneer as a venue?

I like the Pioneer as a venue. It has a nice stage and a good auditorium. The acoustics are really good on the main floor; they're not as good in the auditorium. It's a nice facility, though. It is aging. There are some problems.

It was built in the either late 1960s or early 1970s.

I remember talking to David Hettich when I first got involved with Reno Little Theater. At the time the Pioneer was being built, people building the Pioneer made the proposal to Reno Little Theater that if they sold their building at the time, they could become a resident theater group at the Pioneer. Looking back, it's too bad they didn't. At the time, I remember David Hettich making the argument by saying, "We don't want to do that because we are unique as a theater in that company we have our own building," which is important.

Pioneer is a good space. They have an amazing amount of downstairs area for other venues, theater in the round in the underground and also in the auditorium area up behind the offices. They have nice greenrooms and dressing rooms, and a nice orchestra pit. It's a nice facility.

Are there any difficulties with the building?

Not that I'm aware of. To do the lighting, you've got to pull a lot of cable a lot of places. Side stage lighting is a problem, and they do that by using Christmas trees and hanging bars off the side stage entrances. All stages have problems of one type or another, and that's just one challenge. That's about it.

How would you describe the quality of the Nevada Opera productions?

Absolutely excellent. Some are better than others, but for the most part, the music is glorious. The people who come here to perform are just below the Met level, I would say. They are good, strong artists. Our local chorus is great. The direction we've had is absolutely wonderful. Michael [Borowitz] is

a wonderful director. It's really topnotch. I've seen opera in St. Louis, and that's obviously a higher level or at least a bigger venue, and I don't think it was any better.

Which operas have been the most popular or best attended?

Carmen, *Figaro*, and *Tosca*. Big-name operas are generally the best attended. I can't even remember the name of the one we did just recently. Obviously the ones that don't have a big name aren't as well attended. I guess it's just drawing appeal.

I'm assuming there aren't as many Operas to choose from as there are plays.

Oh, no. There's a ton of operas. There are just hundreds of operas.

That's funny. Are there contemporary operas?

Yes, absolutely. *Nixon in China* is going on in New York right now. There are contemporary operas like crazy. People always think of Opera as a 17th and 18th century art form, but it's not. There are things that are being built and new operas being constructed that are taking on a lot of current issues and events. So, it's there. There are hundreds of operas.

You're right, I think most people think of it as an older form.

Yes, and that's because some of the big names, like *Tosca* or *Carmen* are what people think of when they think of opera. Nobody thinks of *Nixon in China*.

Do you know how the operas performed each season are chosen?

I have my opinion of what we should perform, but I'm not privy to what the selection process is.

Have you seen any trends in how seasons go?

Yes. It seems like the season trend is to pick an old tried-and-true favorite, and also put on something that's lesser-known but that has quality that should interest people that are there for the appreciation of music. It's probably a two-to-one [ratio of] old tried-and-true versus new. Obviously, a lot of operas with 17th and 18th century backgrounds are more expensive to put on because everything involved is more elaborate and more expensive to mount than a lot of the more contemporary forms.

Are there any contemporary operas that have become popular or well known?

I don't think so. There are a lot of operas that people think of as older that are really set around 1900 to 1920. I guess, from our point of view, that is still an old opera, but it really isn't. *Sweeney Todd* is a grim opera. I can't think of a contemporary opera that's really become a favorite. Well, *Porgy & Bess*. I take it back.

How does the Reno community seem to embrace the Nevada Opera?

Like with any arts group, it seems to have a specified audience. When you consider we have in excess of 200,000 people living here and we are lucky if we can get 2,000 people to come to an opera—I don't know if that says something about the community or if it just says something about people's sensibilities and what is worthy entertainment. I personally believe opera is something you have to learn to appreciate. For the most part, I don't

think enough people have been exposed to opera at a young enough age to grow the cadre of people it needs. I think part of the responsibility of the educational system is to expose all people to all art forms. How do you know you like it or dislike something unless you've seen it? I don't think the Opera has as good of an attendance base as it should have. I'm not quite sure how you solve that.

Do any of the operas ever sell out?

Yes. *Carmen* has sold out. I think at least one *Figaro* performance was sold out. There are certain operas that are guaranteed to sell out. People just like them. Everybody has heard the music from *Figaro* in one form or another, even if it's from Bugs Bunny.

What is the average size of an Opera audience?

I would say an average attendance is probably 1,200 to 1,400. In other words, that's considered a good audience. I know a lot of Sunday attendances get 600 to 800, and that hardly even pays to turn the lights on.

For a given performance, how many shows will the Opera put on?

The Opera puts on two performances [of each one] for a couple of reasons. First, they've experimented before with trying to spread it over three performances, and they got the same size audiences, just spread over three performances. There seems to be a certain audience base that comes to opera.

Secondly, it's hard for performers to perform at full volume and full strength, especially when they're coming from different altitudes and from places that are a lot moister than Reno is. It's hard on their voices. Quite often in rehearsals, you hear people singing

at half-throttle. They're not really projecting; they're doing it, but without trying to stretch their voice. Reno is a difficult place for opera singers because it's high and dry.

Are the leading performers brought in from other places?

Almost always. Occasionally, you'll get local people in leading roles. In the last opera we had, Susanna was a local. Usually the lead roles are people that are on contract, though.

What is the Nevada Opera's source of funding, and how is it doing financially?

It's doing terrible. It's in pretty dire straits right now, to the point that I don't know how much of a season they're going to have next year. It's the most expensive art form there is. The cost of ticket sales doesn't cover half of what the production costs are. In other words, the Opera basically loses money on everything it produces. They really depend on donors and grants. In this economic climate, it has gotten worse, especially in terms of corporate donations. Corporate donors are starting to say, "Hey, we can't afford this."

There have been a dozen major opera companies throughout the nation that have gone dark—maybe not closed for good—but they've said, "We can't afford to operate." Major operas, like Sacramento Opera, the Washington Memorial Opera, the New York Performing Arts that performs in Lincoln Center, have gone dark. These are major opera houses that have gone dark. Quite frankly, opera is in dire straits right now and really needs a lot of help. I don't know if we're going to make it or not.

That's too bad. Besides the financial situation, what other major changes have you seen in the Nevada Opera during your involvement?

Michael Borowitz came in, which was a major change. He was a major force and a major super talent. I think that he raised the level of the performances we were putting on. The quality of the shows was much better. He was also able to obtain the services of a better quality of visiting artists. That's the major change I've seen.

In terms of other changes, there's been a gradual turnover in the chorus. Some of the older people have dropped out and some new, younger people from the chorus are being brought in, primarily from the university, and a couple from Carson City. There's been a gradual turnover of younger people in the chorus, which is a great thing. I guess those are the two major things I've seen.

Is there anything about the Nevada Opera that I haven't asked you about that you feel is important to include?

Nothing other than I sure hope it continues.

Can you discuss the skills you have as a stagehand working on opera productions?

When I came out here, I retired in 2001. I worked for Western Union for a long time. When we came out here, Donna started work as wardrobe for Nevada Opera, and I thought, "Why not?" I signed up at the stagehands union, having had experience. I primarily signed up for lighting and electrics. In order to be qualified, you have to pass a basic test on the principles of electricity and things like that. In lighting, it's just primarily experience, and I've had quite a bit of experience. From a professional point of view, I'm probably at a lower level of experience, at least in seniority, so I never was lead electrician or anything like that. It's all good, though. That's it for electrics.

You have to know and be able to pass the basics of electricity. A lot of it is just hauling cable and connections.

The carpenter is not really somebody that uses a hammer and builds things, but somebody that lugs scenery, loads and unloads, hangs drapes, and does all the miscellaneous jobs that need to be done that are not specifically electric jobs.

Lighting and electrics are two different things. There are a lot of electrics that are required. When you stop and consider electrics, there are a lot of huge motors and portable motors that make the backdrops go up and down, that operate the drapes, and that operate the curtains.

Sound is a skill all unto itself. I've known a lot of really good sound men. Really good sound men are usually brought up in the theater and get their experience in the theater. That's just a case of being able to do all of those types of things. When you look at a soundboard, it's like looking at a console of a 747. There are more buttons than you could possibly imagine. You kind of get overwhelmed, like, "What do all of these do?" The fine-tuning of the acoustics of a performance is incredibly complicated.

In which venues have you worked as a stagehand?

In Opera, live theater, shows and conventions. Those are primarily at either the Convention Center or the Grand Sierra.

How would you describe the Convention Center and Grand Sierra as venues? Are there any difficulties or advantages?

I worked on the stage at the Grand Sierra on a couple of call-ins when Donna was there working wardrobe for *Hello, Hollywood*. I

don't know if it still is, but it was the largest stage in the world at the time. It is absolutely immense, with three distinct elevators that come up and form part of the stage floor. They're elevators that are as large as what NASA uses for the lifting of the rockets. It's so big you can roll the airplane—which is a three-quarter mockup of a 707—in the back and not even notice it's there. I think it has twenty rails for drop-in scenery. It is just absolutely immense. There's no way you can compare it with anything else I've worked on.

It's just huge and underused to the max. Grand Sierra and the Hilton used it to put shows on, but generally they would use a fraction of the stage. When *Hello, Hollywood* was there, they used the whole thing up and down. It not only goes down three floors below the stage, but it goes up 80 feet, and there are things that can drop out of the ceiling. You can get up to fifty performers on the passerelle that comes down. It is just absolutely immense.

Reno Little Theater had a nice stage in the building they had. When they performed at Hug High, it was a typical high school stage, which is fine. I've also seen high-school performances at Wooster and Galena. Galena always put on nice performances. I say that because my grandkids were there and I saw them.

I've seen other venues. The one that was the most interesting is the El Dorado. The El Dorado has a nice stage but it has probably been the tiniest stage. I don't understand how a performer can work on it. There is no side stage; there is no back stage. You make your escape into the alley. It is just absolutely ridiculous.

I can remember when the Flamingo Hilton downtown put on *Best Little Whorehouse*. The escape from that stage was the fire escape; that was the way you got off stage. It's amazing these theater stages around town in various

places that are just infinitesimal and tiny. The stage in the showroom at Harrah's is not very big; it's a small stage. It's interesting when you look at different venues.

In St. Louis, I worked on the community college, which had a nice stage. It was a decent-size stage, and its escape was through the carpenter shop, which was immediately behind it. It's funny, the different things you remember about those.

I went to the Fox Theater which was wonderful. That is where you got a lot of touring shows. At the Fox I've seen "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina," *Evita*, which I didn't care for much, and *Beauty and the Beast*, which was absolutely fantastic.

Miss Saigon is the modern version of *Madame Butterfly*. It takes place in Vietnam. It takes place during Vietnam and the evacuation of Saigon. I saw it here, and they couldn't do it justice because the stage at the Pioneer wasn't big enough. I saw it at the Fox, and they actually land the helicopter on stage, which is an amazing effect. I was in the third row, and when they landed that helicopter onstage with its landing lights out into the audience, it was just amazing.

I've seen wonderful shows there. The Fox Theater is a nice stage. It has a twin in Detroit, of old movie houses that were built during the 1920s that have been converted into live theater stages. When they put *Miss Saigon* on here, they didn't have the room to do that, so they had to simulate the helicopter and the glaring of the lights and sound into the audience to simulate the helicopter landing. It was an okay performance, though.

That's like not *Les Mis* but the other one. *Les Mis* is a wonderful production that I love.

How has your work as a stagehand changed over the years in terms of advances in equipment and technology?

The electronics have changed a lot, especially for lighting. Lighting has become much more complicated and much more computerized. You're able to do a lot more things with lights than you were ever able to before.

From my experience, when I first became involved in theater, I was using computerized lightboards. They were relatively simple, though, in that you used fixed instruments and set them up with certain things and then programmed the computer to turn them on and off at various degrees and at various times to set patterns. A lot of the new computerized instruments swivel, pivot, change colors, and focus—all those things automatically through computerized commands faster than a person could ever change them by hand. That's just amazing.

Sound is just gradually evolving. Sound is better and better all the time. I don't think there's been a major change in stagecraft per se. You still have the flown-in sets. You still have drops. You still have set pieces. That's standard.

In general, how receptive do you think Reno as a community is to arts and culture?

Mediocre. You have a tough time filling an auditorium of a relatively small size for the size of our city. You can get more people to go to a blockbuster movie than you can get to go to a live performance. I don't think that's changed; I think that's just kind of there.

There's a certain number of people that enjoy certain art forms. In a lot of cases, particularly with opera, you have to be educated before you can learn to appreciate it.

Can you pinpoint anything in northern Nevada culture that causes us to be slightly uninterested in cultural things?

Three-hundred channels of TV. [laughs] You hear this all the time. People look at TV and say there are three-hundred channels and nothing on. We are jaded. There is so much available that we don't know what we're looking at. We carry more entertainment in our pockets than our parents ever thought of having. We are jaded by what we can see. Special effects in movies are nothing like the special effects of twenty years ago. As that type of thing evolves, people expect more and want more. I guess they become less interested in thinking for themselves and letting their imagination do the work. They want things provided for them. That's just an evolution.

The key to keeping people involved in the arts is exposure. I think the educational system has a responsibility to do that. The more theater, music, and various art forms there are available through the university and through lower school systems, the more exposure there will be [which will lead to] better attendance and better acceptance of other art forms.

One of the greatest things I ever saw in local theater was a production called *Quack* at the university. It's the story of *The Ugly Duckling*. I can't remember who directed it, but it was absolutely brilliant. It has minimal staging, but it's the story of the ugly duckling, and the ducks all use baseball caps and orange bills. It's a neat performance. I thought it was just absolutely brilliant.

Is there much support for arts and cultural organizations from the Reno community, or anything from individuals or corporate sponsors?

Financially, there's less available than there was because of the economy. Educationally, there is less available because it's boiled down to where the university and the community

colleges are the only ones providing those types of programs. There are fewer amateur things, like Reno Little Theater, than there used to be.

When we first got here in the 1970s, at various times there were Reno Little Theater and Sparks Civic Theater. There were probably four or five theater groups going on at various times. Reno Little Theater was the only one that performed in its own building. I remember Sparks Civic Theater performed in a warehouse. I worked in it one time when Jim Cashell was directing *Little Foxes*.

I think there's less availability. There are fewer people that are actively involved in the "Let's put on a show" type thing.

What impact do you think the cultural activities you've been involved with have had on northern Nevada and on Reno?

The appreciation of the arts stimulates the imagination; it stimulates a lot of things. I don't know if you can say that, from a business aspect, it does anything. It certainly improves the civic values and the civic tone of what a community is all about, though. Without active arts within a community, that community starts to become cold and uninvolved with fellow people.

LARRY JACOX

Allison Tracy: To start out, can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Larry Jacox: A little small town in the Cascades of Washington called White Salmon, Washington, right on the Columbia River. I was born there and spent eighteen years of my life there. I went to high school, graduated, and went off to the Navy from there.

What prompted you to go in the Navy?

Actually, it was one of those mistakes that turned out to be really great. My friend and I had been seeing so many John Wayne movies, we were all going to join the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps recruiter wasn't in that day, but the Navy recruiter was. [laughs]

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

Dad was an old Nebraska farm boy. He and Mom got married and moved from Nebraska... it must have been about 1935 or

1936, to White Salmon, where I was born. He had been in the military before that, and then he worked as a lumberjack, for a number of years. He finally settled down with his brother. His brother, my uncle, lived across the river from us. He settled in White Salmon and went to work in the sawmill there. He worked there for pretty much the rest of his life.

Mom was about ten years younger than Dad. She had taught some school earlier back in Nebraska in one of those little one-room schools. Then she got married and moved out to White Salmon. Mom and Dad got divorced about the time I went into high school. My brother and I stayed with my dad. So Mom moved up to Spokane.

Can you tell me a little about the schools that you went to?

Initially it was just the local public schools in White Salmon—grade school and high school. I went to Columbia High School, a great high school. I think we had some of the best teachers in the country.

I went in the Navy, got out, and had the G.I. Bill. The first couple of years I went to University of Washington as a commercial art and fine arts dual major. I dropped out for a little bit, bummed around for a year or so, and landed here in Nevada. Then in probably about 1961 or so I started back up at the University of Nevada and graduated from here in 1963.

Beyond that, I've done some summer courses. I never really got too much further along toward getting a master's or anything, but I have done some summer work. University of California had a great summer session in Guadalajara, Mexico, so that was fun. And a number of other places around the country....

Do you remember any art, music, or theater programs in any of the schools that you went to?

Well, of course, I remember the art program at the University of Washington. Being an art major, I took the basic classwork. The University of Nevada was fun. There was a whole cultural sea change by the time I started going to UNR. For the first couple of years at the University of Washington, I was taught mostly nuts-and-bolts basic art stuff—learning how to draw, learning how to use the medium and whatnot, but also getting acquainted with the commercial aspects of commercial art.

When I came down here, it was like we were almost getting into the beginning of the hippie movement or something to that effect. There was a whole laidback style of teaching by the time I got to UNR. Jim McCormick taught a methods class. I changed my major to art education, and Jim had a real hands-on, nuts-and-bolts approach to what you were going to need to teach. The other classes were laid back: "Do your own thing. We're not going to worry too much about structure. Just

go where the painting muse takes you." It was fun. It was a neat experience.

Do you remember who else was around in the department?

Don Kerr was the one I liked the most. He taught upper-level oil painting classes. He was a good guy and a good artist. I loved his art. I think he is still alive. I think Jim said he is down in California someplace now, obviously retired at this point.

I think Craig Sheppard was the nominal department chair at that time. He was on sabbatical, though, I think in Japan. I can't remember who was running the show at that time. The department had a good bunch of students. By the time you get to your junior and senior year, you start getting your little community, your little group. We had a nice bunch going there—Barbara Barengo, Willie Chism, and a few others in the class. We all got reasonably friendly.

One of the things that was really neat was the Smiths downtown...Lois Smith of the Smith family that ran Harolds Club would sponsor a bus for the art students to go down to San Francisco and be exposed to some San Francisco art. They did this about every year, and those were some fun trips. We would go down to check out the Legion of Honor and some of the various art venues in San Francisco. Like I say, the last couple of years were fun.

Do you remember where the classes were held?

They were in the same building they are now, the Church Fine Arts Building, on the third floor and second floor. I guess if you count the basement, it is the third floor. We were in the upper reaches of Church Fine Arts. I guess the wing hadn't been put on yet, so it was still basically the old structure.

Is there studio space to work?

Oh, sure. There are classrooms, but they are set up with easels and everything you need to paint.

Do you remember what the curriculum that the Art Department was offering and what classes were available to students at that time?

It was pretty complete, as I recall. I don't think they had a master's program yet set up; they do now. They had a good ceramic shop down in the basement. They had a pretty good printmaking studio. They had all the different painting and drawing classes—all the basic stuff.

Like I say, Jim ran the education portion of it where they were trying to give ideas for how to actually run a classroom in the public schools. It seems like they had pretty much everything you would need for a pretty well-rounded education.

Why did you decide to focus on art education?

I decided somewhere along the way that I needed to make a living at it. There were probably more artists making a living teaching than there were out there actually pounding the pavement looking for a commercial art job, or a fine art job, for that matter. I don't know of too many people in Reno who have been able to make a living as a fine artist.

Actually, there was a sidebar to that, too. I wanted to have the credentials so I could teach, but at some point along the way, I got married. My wife was pretty aviation-minded, and I had always been an aviation nut from the get-go. We decided that when I graduated, I was going to go to Officer Candidate School for the Air Force and make a career out of the Air Force. I already had some military time and so it seemed like a natural thing to do.

Coming out with the art education degree, I actually had a convening day for Officer Candidate School. The class didn't convene, though, until the following May. So I figured, "Well, I'll take a short-term contract with the schools and then when the convening day comes around, I'll just head off to Officer Candidate School." Well, I guess I got into the rut of teaching and stayed with it, and Officer Candidate School went by the wayside.

What were your studies and classes like for art education?

It consisted mostly of methods and materials of teaching art in a secondary school. I think that was the one and only course I took that was actually applicable to art classes. Mostly the curriculum covered different projects you could get your students involved with. When I actually started teaching, it was a somewhat different experience. It was primarily a matter of trying to get you prepped for what you were going to run into in schools and how to go about managing the students.

When I graduated and I got hired at Billinghurst, I was teaching with a veteran teacher who had been teaching art there forever and ever, Angie DeNevi, who is a great gal. She was practically an institution at Billinghurst. She was very crafts oriented. I'm not sure if she ever really did any fine art, but she knew every craft vehicle available. That is pretty much what she channeled the kids in there to do, so I just tagged along and followed suit with what she was doing.

By the time you got to UNR, had you focused on painting as your artistic medium?

I've always been focused on drawing and painting. I don't know if the university did

anything one way or another to change that basic motivation. I had been drawing and painting since before high school. I always had a set of watercolors onboard ship when I was in the Navy. I don't know if I'd say it focused me in on it. That focus has always been there, in or out of school.

Do you feel that your time studying at UNR was influential on you at all as an artist?

Oh, sure. One of the things with art classes at that level is that once you get beyond the basics, is it becomes a seminar atmosphere. More so than instruction, you were getting some input from the prof. You were also cross-pollinating with other people in the class. You would see where they were going with their ideas or how they were trying to express their creativity and originality. Then you had your own format and so did they.

Part of the culture shock for me was that for my first couple of years, I had been doing nuts-and-bolts, learning how to paint objectively, learning how to put down something that really was more illustrative than, say, Abstract Expressionism, which was the big thing at that time. When I came to Nevada, we had a model, and I started painting. I think I painted something that looked pretty realistic, and everybody else around me was painting abstract, very Impressionistic, or loose Impressionistic. I felt like I was Joe Rube from the sticks for a while until I started seeing where they were going. I started loosening up my style and trying to do a little bit more expressive stuff rather than just strictly objective realism. It was fun. To me, that was probably the important thing about being in the classes—just being able to see what other people were doing. The prof, of course, was important too, but just molding your ideas with the group more than anything else....

Did you have to take other classes outside of drawing and painting?

When I was at U.W., they required you to do everything. I think you were required to take one ceramics class, for example. There was a basic curriculum, almost like in high school. If you were going to be a commercial art major, you had to fulfill certain requirements...we had to take Drawing 101, 102, and 103. We were on a quarter system. We had Basic Composition 1, 2, and 3. We had to take a watercolor class and a ceramics class, or sculpture class, as they called it. You had to do a little bit of all the basic stuff.

At UNR, we had already fulfilled our requirements, so we were free to do more. If you wanted to go into sculpture, you could go down in the basement and work down there. If you wanted to do painting, you would go upstairs. They didn't really pursue watercolor very much, and that is a whole other story. Watercolor is my passion nowadays. For a long while there was a...I don't want to say cultural bias against it, but it was the attitude that "real men" paint in oils. If you are a lackadaisical hobbyist, then you can go paint in watercolors. It was that sort of an attitude. I don't think that exists now, but I think that was always the unwritten mantra.

Was watercolor somehow considered an easier medium?

No, I don't think it's ever been considered an easier medium. You talk to most people today and they will say, "Oh, I don't want to mess with watercolor. You can't control it." It is hard to say. If you look at the prices of paintings, an oil painting will typically command a lot more than a same-size watercolor. I'm not quite sure where it stems from.

Of course, all the old masters always painted in oil. It has always seemed like there was a little more of a visceral approach to slapping a lot of oil painting on a big canvas, rather than sitting there with a small sable brush putting transparent watercolor on.

What did you think of Reno when you first came here, and what you brought you here?

I came to Reno because I didn't have a job. When I dropped out of the University of Washington, I went to work for a computer outfit in a training capacity, but their computer project fizzled out. They let us all go with a little bit of money, so I was just kicking around the country after that. I stopped in to see a friend of a friend and I spent a few days down in Sunnyvale. I started to run out of money, so I went looking for a job and got hired by a little finance company to come up and work in Reno.

Actually, I had a tawdry view of Reno. I never much liked it when I first got here. It was okay. It was a place to be. You had the gambling. I initially stayed at a boardinghouse that is no longer there, the Packer's Guest House over on Maple Street. It was a big old house that had been converted over into a boardinghouse. The freeway is there now. I had two other roommates--a good bunch. Nice people ran the place—Bill Packer and his wife, a retired marine. Most of the trade there were people coming to town for the "six-week cure" [divorce]. People would come in from out of town, stay there, get their residency, and get a divorce. Then they were gone. It was just very transient. People came to Reno for all the wrong reasons. They came to get divorced, they came to gamble away money—all kinds of these tawdry things.

After a while, after I got going in school, I started getting a little bit of a better view of

things. I started getting into the more solid community—the community that existed outside of the downtown area. Of course, once you get a degree and start teaching, you are much more involved with the longtime residents, so it started to look like a much more solid, more respectable community to me.

How did you realize that you had talent and an interest in drawing and painting?

Most kids who develop an interest in art probably start off with a pencil in their hand somewhere along the way. One of the oldest memories I have is of my mom. She would get tired of my pestering her, so she would give me a pencil and tell me to go draw a picture from a comic book. I guess I took to it, because that seemed to be one of her favorite ways to keep me out of her hair.

You get a little bit of a facility with it, and then you start being known as the kid who can draw. Your classmates all think, "Oh, he is drawing all the time and is pretty good." You get this mutual feedback thing going. I couldn't do anything else. I could never play basketball or football, but I could draw a little bit. I got a little bit of personal recognition there. I think that fired it up. I always enjoyed it, though, too. It wasn't just something I was doing just as an attention-getter. I did enjoy it. After that, it just became part of my life.

Do you remember when you started painting?

Yes, actually. My mom and dad were divorced, but somewhere around my sophomore year, my mom gave me a set of oil paints. We were poor folks living in a small town, and I had always been drawing, so Mom gave me a set of oil paints. I use them from time to time.

But Dad did something that I always wished he had lived long enough that I could have thanked him for. He got one of these art correspondence courses. You might think, “How can anybody learn art through a correspondence course?” I think it was Art Instruction, Incorporated, which might still be around. It was god-awfully expensive. I think it was about \$150, which back in the 1950s was a lot of money for a sawmill worker. He got it, though.

It was accompanied by a great set of books that showed every aspect of commercial art. The program also sent a ton of materials, including a watercolor set. That was the first time I had ever played with watercolors. They were real watercolors with a good brush on illustration board rather than the old Prang watercolors they gave you in school with the crappy brush.

Probably about the first time I had paints was in my sophomore year, when my mom gave me some oil paints. I think it was my junior year when Dad got that correspondence course. I started painting then and loved the watercolors. The watercolors stayed with me for years. I packed them aboard ship and took them in my sea bag whenever I was transferred. It was great. That was one of the best things that ever had happened to me.

What is it about drawing and painting that you enjoy?

To me it is just fun to see a painting emerge from a sheet of paper or from a canvas if you’re doing that. I don’t know. It is kind of hard to explain. Just watching something emerge on paper or canvas is very satisfying.

Is there a particular style or a subject that you focus on?

I like pretty much all styles. My particular style is my own, but I like all styles. I like everything from Jackson Pollock’s dibbles and dabs to Norman Rockwell’s photographic illustrations. To me, they are all valid and all very enjoyable to look at.

My own particular style—I never really got abstract. I’ve never been able to handle abstract too well, but I’ve gone from fairly hard-line realism to loose and Impressionistic. I’m gravitating back towards hard-line realism again, mostly for scenery. There are other things I like to paint, but they’re not too commercial. If I paint them, I just paint them for fun.

I’ve always been an aviation nut, so I love doing aviation painting. That is a kind of niche area in which you wind up painting them and enjoying them. Unless you have some friends you can give them away to or a market for them, they wind up sitting under your bed. They’re fun to do, though.

I like marine subjects, too. They are a little more commercial. I’ve done a number of harbor scenes and whatnot over the years. Commercially they’ve been fairly successful. I enjoy painting people. I’m not a portrait painter, but I do enjoy putting people in paintings from time to time. Actually, I’m pretty much a hard-line realist, painting mostly scenery with a few excursions into objects that I enjoy: things with wheels and things with wings.

What have been some of the more memorable pieces that you’ve done or pieces that you particularly enjoyed painting?

I guess I painted so many things over the years, I’m trying to think if there is anything in particular. Nothing really stands out, as I think about it. There have been pieces I can

remember painting that I really liked a lot, but usually I paint and move on.

Can you tell me about any awards or honors that you have received for your art?

Nothing in the way of nationwide things. I have a wall of ribbons back there that I have received from local art shows over the years, but no big organizations like California Watercolor Society or anything like that. It is mostly just the local Sierra Watercolor Society and Nevada Art Association. Like I say, that has been validating. I get a Best of Show every now and again and blue ribbons. It is not consistent. Every once in a while I get a misguided judge who will give me a ribbon. [laughter]

Are you able to make any money from your painting and your drawings?

Yes, I've been pretty consistent over the years. I've been lucky. I've been able to be a member of the Artist's Co-op Gallery off and on. I dropped out a couple of times when I had problems of one sort or another. I go back with the Artist's Co-op for a good twenty years. It has provided a place where I can show my art and it has been reasonably profitable. I mean, it is not rolling in money or anything like that. Last year I grossed, before I started accounting for expenses, about \$3,000 or so on artwork. It's been fairly consistent—\$2,500 to \$3,000 gross over the last ten to fifteen years. Some years have been a little better, and some have been worse. It has not made me wealthy, but it has been a nice source of additional income. I think more than anything else, the selling just provides the recognition that somebody else likes your painting well enough to buy it. I get more satisfaction out of that than I do the money, although the money is nice. [laughs]

What is the Artist's Co-op?

I think it is about forty-nine years old now. I can't remember the exact date, but it was founded about fifty years ago by a group of about twenty artists. They just decided they wanted to have an avenue to sell their paintings, so they got together and rented this building down on Mill Street. It was an old French laundry. It has been there for eons. They converted it over. They figured they would try to have enough room for each of the artists to have a certain amount of space to display their work. They have volunteers sitting at the desk every day so they don't have to hire anybody and can keep their expenses to an absolute minimum. They charge a real small commission to keep overhead.

They also have a monthly fee. It works out pretty well. I think the fee is \$35 a month. The commission is 20 percent, which is lower than almost any commercial gallery. Commercial galleries run anywhere from 35 to 50 percent these days. It allows the artist to be able to paint, sell his work at a reasonable price, and still make some money at it.

It has been pretty successful, considering that it is run by a group of artists, and artists are not notably very well organized. To try to get them together to have any kind of a successful venture for that long is pretty remarkable. They have always had pretty good quality people in it.

I used to have a list of the original members. Lyle Ball, who was a real big name in painting years ago, was one of the original members. His wife Esther Ball took care of the books. They were the attraction. Velda Morby was one of the originals. Mary Chadwell, who is still a member, is in her nineties now. She is close to being a charter member. I think she joined two or three months after it was started.

Almost every artist who has any sort of a reputation in Reno has probably been a member of it at one time or other. It has been a starting point for some, and for others it has been their main gallery representation.

Do you remember when you became involved and how that came about?

Well, it was a friend of a friend of a friend sort of a thing. My ex-wife's grandmother was a good friend of Mary Chadwell's. Susie's grandmother was aware that I was painting, and she mentioned this to Mary. Mary sponsored me into the Co-op. That was how that came about. It has just always been a real nice, friendly bunch of people.

Are they still in that same location on Mill Street?

Same place, yes. Right now the building is falling apart. [laughs] It was originally a French laundry called Escallier's. I understand the Escallier family originally had a home on the corner of Wells and Mill, and the laundry was next door. The laundry is what became the Artist's Co-op. Initially it was just a smaller building. Over the years, it has been added onto in the back to make more room.

Somewhere along the way, the Escalliers, I believe, also owned the lot next door to it and that was given to the Co-op. I mean, we still rent. It was given to part and parcel of the Co-op. They were able to blacktop that and make it into a small parking area. That is the genesis of the Co-op.

This last rainstorm we had blew the roof off, or at least the back part of the roof. It has been dripping and leaking back there. We're getting enough sunny days that they will get a new roof on it in the next day or so. It has been an adventure.

At any given time, how many artists display at the Co-op?

They keep the membership at about nineteen or twenty. We just lost one, so we are either at eighteen or nineteen. We are now using one of the walls that had been devoted to a member for what we call the Heritage Wall. We have invited people who own artwork from previous Nevada artists (who are either gone or in some cases not painting anymore), to bring in those works, which we will re-sell for them on this Heritage Wall. It is a nice venue for people who are downsizing or who have an estate where somebody had a work by Bill Moore, for instance. Bill Moore was a good friend. He died, but he had an awful lot of artwork that we have sold through that Heritage Wall.

We have a committee that screens people. People can come in if they are interested and submit examples of their work. When we have an opening, the screening committee will go through the applicants and try to put people in. We always look for, good artwork, of course, trying to keep our standards reasonably high.

One of the secrets of the Co-op has been that we get along with each other pretty well. That has been an aspect we look for in a new member—somebody who can get along with others and somebody who plays well with others.

Are there any special exhibits or events at the Co-op?

We have a person who tries to get some of our artwork out to other places where it might be seen and get a little publicity and maybe even sell some paintings. Occasionally we will have some of our artwork up in a restaurant another public place. Occasionally we'll have

a booth at a special event, but that is about it. We don't get involved in education programs to speak of. Occasionally we will show some student artwork as something good for the community.

In terms of the patrons of the Co-op, is it the same group of people or does it seem to attract anyone from Reno?

It is a funny market. We have a lot of old-timers who have been around the area for a long time. They know where we are, they know we have good art down there, and they are a core that supports us a lot. We also get some visitors from downtown who somehow hear about us from casinos, or lord knows where. They will walk up to the Co-op from downtown.

Its location can be an obstacle to attracting new patrons. You're not going to get a lot of drive-by people who see the sign and say, "Oh, there is an art gallery. I think I'll stop in." A lot of our clientele is gained through word of mouth. Of course we try to get the word out, too, that we are there. A lot of folks come into town who live here for a long time and never even realize we are there. We are always trying to get the word out to let new people know of our whereabouts. It has been pretty successful, but it is hard to say precisely who is our clientele.

Who are the people that do the volunteer work?

Well, it is not a case of volunteers. If you are a member there, you are expected to sit. Every three months we get a new schedule and all the members are assigned a sitting date. It works out that everybody has to take a turn at the desk about five times every quarter. That is how we do it. Everybody has to take a turn at it.

In the years that you have been involved in the Co-op, have there been any general changes or accomplishments?

There have been some changes. One of the biggest changes was that we started getting into some crafters and bringing in some crafts. We do have a lot of people who bring craft items in on a consignment basis—baskets and ceramic stuff. We have some people who create really exquisite pine-needle baskets. It is really fine work. I can't tell you how many of those we have. I think we've got fifteen or twenty crafters who bring things in. That began about fifteen or twenty years ago.

Initially it was all strictly fine artists. There was a little consternation about that when we first started doing the crafts work. There were people who wanted to keep it art for art's sake. There were some who looked down their nose at crafts. They didn't think that was really what an art gallery should be doing. However, the crafts, from a commercial standpoint, have been very successful. For every painting that goes out the door, I would say about four or five baskets or bowls are sold, and help pay the overhead. That is probably been the biggest change that I've seen over the years.

The quality of the artwork has, I think, maintained well. I don't know that there have been any other changes.

Do you have monthly meetings?

We're supposed to have a monthly meeting, and we usually do. It depends on who is president, but we have a monthly meeting of the board. At least once a quarter we have a general meeting of all the members. We try to keep everybody informed about what is going on.

Are there any artists who display at the Co-op who are able to make a living off of their art?

Erik Holland comes pretty close. The Co-op is not his main source of income, but he is pretty close to being a full-time professional artist, although he teaches some, too. Most of us are retired. When I was still teaching, that was my day job.

I don't think anybody is making enough money through the Co-op to actually support themselves. It is mostly additional income. Erik is the only one who is really a truly starving artist. [laughs]

Do the artists who are displaying there have a say in the decision-making process?

Oh, yes. It is very democratically run.

You talked a little about teaching art at Billingshurst. Can you describe your approach to teaching art?

When I was teaching at Billingshurst, I only had two or three art classes. At junior high, they spread your talents all around. Angie, as I said before, was *the* art teacher. She was the one who really did the lion's share of teaching. Mostly I just tagged along with her and followed her lead, which was mostly crafts. If we were doing a leaf ashtray, you would just gather the kids around and show them how it is done. You would then cut them loose with a chunk of clay and let them go at it.

I later got into teaching Spanish. I had a minor in Spanish, but my background was all grammar. Spanish at the time was being taught from an audio-lingual point of view, so I was not very handy at that. I finally got out of that to do something different.

Now I teach art to seniors through UNR's Extended Studies program. As a matter of fact, tomorrow I have a second class in watercolor. It has been really fun because I am teaching

adults now. They want to learn and I think they enjoy it.

My approach basically is that on the first day we meet, we talk about watercolor materials—materials that you can get, what is expensive, what is inexpensive, and what you really need to start.

Tomorrow I will show them how to lay out a palette and get their colors out. It is just basic stuff. I'm assuming that everybody starts not knowing much about it, so I show them through illustration, with my own brushes and my own watercolor, what happens when watercolor does this, when you add this amount of paint, or when you mix the colors. Then I have them do it. I have them follow along to get control of the medium. I then let them go wherever they really want to with the medium once they get comfortable with how the medium works. I don't know if it's a philosophy. I just tell them about it, illustrate it, and have them do it.

While you were working at the school district, did you have a sense of how the district supported art classes?

I was never really that concerned about it. At that point, I was young and just out of school. I figured, "I'll do whatever they tell me." It seems like we always had art classes all the time I taught up until 1981. There wasn't any talk about cutting them. I have a good friend who taught mechanical drawing and industrial arts, and they had industrial arts right up until the time I quit. I don't know if they started doing away with those after I quit or not. At least where I taught, there was always an art program, an industrial arts program, and a music program.

They were always really proud of their music program. They had good teachers, good programs, and good people going out from

the schools with musical and art backgrounds. When I taught back in the 1960s and 1970s, I would say they supported the arts pretty well. I don't know what it is like today.

How receptive were the students to what you were teaching them?

They enjoyed it. I was teaching the seventh graders primarily. Angie taught the seventh, eighth, and at that time ninth grade, which they had until they rearranged the schools a little bit. I was basically doing crafts. They were eager. Kids always like to play with beans or clay. They were always eager learners for that hands-on stuff.

What challenges did you face in dealing with seventh graders?

Oh, they were kids. They were just antsy and whatnot, but I was keeping them interested, mostly. The academic classes were a little trickier. In an art classroom you have more freedom. They can move around. Kids are restless at seventh-grade level, so if you have something you can keep their hands busy with, they're pretty good. There weren't any real problems there.

What was the art curriculum like at that time?

When I first started, we still had high-schoolers. Originally, it was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. Somewhere down the way they decided ninth graders needed to be in high school because that was a high-school area. We went from there to just seventh and eighth grade.

The kids were channeled through a series of what they called "exploratory" courses. They chopped it up so that every seventh grader would be able to have six weeks or

so of art and six weeks or so of some kind of music. I have no idea what they did for six weeks in music. They got a little exposure to some languages. I think they did six weeks in French, six weeks in Spanish, and six weeks in German. It was exploratory so they could get a little taste of this and that.

Over the course of six weeks, we had it down to where they would make a clay project, and then we would do a mosaic project. I don't think we ever got into leather or anything like that. It was just enough time to give them a little bit of exposure to crafts.

Now, for the eighth and ninth grade I can't say because Angie taught those art classes. I'm not quite sure what the structure was like there.

What do you see as the importance of having that exposure available to students?

I think it is good. It is the idea that a well-rounded education includes the arts. What was Bertrand Russell's comment years ago? He wrote an essay on the importance of trivial information. What makes a person a well-rounded person is having a little bit of knowledge about an awful lot of areas, some of which may be considered trivial or peripheral. It is all important, though.

Thinking about the arts community in Reno, who have been local artists that you've worked with or crossed paths with?

Over the years, I have bumped into, certainly not every artist in town, but a fair number of those who have been in similar organizations with me. I knew Lyle Ball when I was down at the Co-op. I have also known Pat Bergstrom and Thelma Calhoun from Carson. There have been so many people. Corlis Bonds—I loved her work.

I would have to go back and look at a list of all the people who have been in the Co-op over the years. I has been a fun experience just meeting them. I ran into Jim McCormick through the Unitarian fellowship, but I had him back in college years ago. There have been so many neat people who have been in the arts, and it has been enjoyable knowing them all. They have all been fun to be around.

I mentioned Bill Moore. I liked Bill. He, Jim, and I all had the same birthday. We used to celebrate our birthdays together until he died. Velda Morby was a fun person. She wrote the column and was an incredible booster for the arts in the area.

Roy Powers is a great guy. He has been really active as an ad man for years. He does these terrific Gouaches of old residences and old buildings here in town. He uses opaque watercolor or acrylic, one of the two.

How would you describe the arts community in Reno?

I could give you a corny answer like “vibrant” or something like that. It is a real active group. We have a lot of people who are interested in the arts and who support the arts. A lot of people are interested in creating art, whether on an amateur or more professional basis.

Sierra Watercolor Society is probably one of the most active groups in town right now. I’m not sure what their membership is, but it is well over a hundred. It might be even close to two hundred. They’re active, they’re interested, and they’re painting.

I get a little bit of that spillover in my classes—the people who decide they want to try to do art and, boy, they are gung-ho about it. I think it is a really active community. It is a very art-oriented bunch around here.

What sorts of changes have you seen in the arts community over the years?

I think it has grown. I think it’s always had that enthusiasm. A few years back when Artown started up...I don’t know if that fanned the flames for art interest or not. It might have somewhat, but there has always been the interest there. It has just grown some, and maybe Artown put a spotlight on it and let people know that they weren’t alone in their artistic efforts.

What are some of the challenges that artists in Reno face?

Just getting their work out and having it shown. That is probably the biggest problem that any artist has anywhere. You can sit in front of an easel and paint pictures all day long, but if you want to get any recognition or make any money at it, then you have to be able to get those paintings out to where people can see them and enjoy them. You have let your peers see them, too. That is probably the biggest challenge, I think, that any artist has anytime—finding a venue to display their work.

Are there any advantages or benefits of being an artist in Reno?

I think there are, from a standpoint of the social aspect of it. We don’t have N.A.A. anymore, but there is the Sierra Watercolor Society and the Latimer Art Club. There are places where you can be with other people who enjoy art. You have a chance to be able to make some friends that have similar interests. In that respect, I think you would have to call that an advantage to being an artist in Reno—the fact that there are clubs around where you can rub shoulders with and talk to other artists.

The Watercolor Society has a really good series of workshops. They have all kinds of top-named artists coming into town to demonstrate their skills. That furthers the social aspect of it. It promotes their ability, but there is also a social aspect. If you were a newcomer to Reno and you had a little bit of artistic talent, that would be the way to go—get involved in art clubs and start making some friends.

You mentioned the art clubs as being one venue for displaying work. What is available to artists locally besides what we have talked about?

It is kind of limited. Our little Artist's Co-op has been a good place for people to display their work, but we can only handle so many at a time. We have certain standards, too. There are other galleries around. There is the Stremmel Gallery, which doesn't take a whole lot of local talent. They display more of a national and internationally known list of people. They do show some local artists, but for the most part, if you are just an everyday Reno artist, you are probably not going to be at Stremmel.

The Richardson Gallery has the same situation. They tend to draw from outside of the area, although, again, they will take a few local people. There are a number of other galleries around. Most of them are not restricted, but they don't have a real big artist list. There is not a big venue for showing, other than through the clubs.

If you are an artist and you want to get your artwork displayed, you are probably going to have to go through one of the clubs to do their shows. They are pretty active, but they are generally for people who are Sunday artists or a midstream talent sort of artist.

In our initial meeting, you mentioned a two-tiered art community in Reno.

Yes, I was alluding to that with the galleries—Stremmel and Richardson. There used to be Addi Gallery. I don't know if they're still around, but they were pretty pricey. They had artists of pretty good reputation, and to a large degree who were not local. Like I say, the rest of us midrange, midstream artists have our own cycle of art shows and clubs. In that respect I think there are the galleries that sell to the people in Caughlin Ranch, and the rest of us who may be good amateurs or whatever you want to call us. That is what I meant by two-tiered.

How supportive is Reno of the local artists' community?

I think they are supportive. We have sold through the Co-op and through the various shows that the clubs have. We sell reasonably well. I think that is a sign that the local community is not opposed to buying art by people who don't necessarily have world-class names or worldwide reputations.

What local art shows have you been able to participate in?

I've been in Watercolor Society actually since it began back in 2002. Watercolor Society has always had about three shows a year. I participate in that almost every year. Back when the Nevada Arts Association was in Reno, they would try to have two or three shows a year. I would always try to participate in Nevada Artists Association shows. I've been a member of Latimer now for ten or fifteen years. I'm lackadaisical there. Some of their shows I participate in, some of them I don't. I try to support the local clubs by participating as much as I can.

What is the Latimer Art Club?

I'm probably not the best historian of the club. It originates from the fairly well-known southern California painter named Lorenzo Latimer. I'm not sure if I'm totally accurate here, but as I understand it he would come up to Reno in the summertime to paint the Sierras. He got a group of people together and would give classes while he was here, I suppose to make a little money.

The classes evolved into this group of friends and students of his. As time went on, it evolved into the Latimer Art Club. It has been around for quite a number of years. They call themselves the oldest art club in Nevada. I want to say ninety years, but I don't want to misrepresent it. It has been around for quite a long while. Latimer came up here, I want to say, in the thirties, so it could well be ninety years. It has been around a long time. Its membership has waxed and waned over the years. Again, that has a two-tiered membership. It includes artists who are regular members. Then there are associate members who are people who don't paint but are just interested in the arts and want to support the club by being a member. They are still going. A matter of fact, we have a show in Carson City right now.

How did you become involved in the Latimer Art Club?

Through Ruth Cantrell, who is an artist who has painted in this area for years. She was at the Co-op, and she mentioned that I probably should come over and join Latimer. I tagged along one time and just signed up.

Are there membership fees to join?

Just annual fees, usually. Sierra Watercolor Society is thirty bucks a year. Latimer is twenty-five or thirty dollars a year.

Do you have monthly meetings?

Yes, they pretty much all follow a similar format. Usually at both the Watercolor Society and Latimer, there will be a business meeting with a little talk or a demo afterwards. There is a program. With Latimer, quite often it is not so much a demo as a talk about some cultural or artistic aspect of the community. Watercolor Society tends to feature more actual art demonstrations of some technique or style.

How did the Sierra Watercolor Society get started, and when did you get involved?

Joyce Burke started it. She was a watercolor artist. If I remember correctly, her husband worked in Las Vegas. I think he worked in hotel security. He got transferred up to Lake Tahoe, and Joyce wanted to continue her painting activities up there. She got a local group going up at South Lake. Then they moved down to Reno, and that is where Joyce came up with the idea of creating a watercolor club down here.

I remember one of the first meetings. We were meeting in the basement of the old Sierra Arts Building over on Ridge Street. I want to say this was twenty-five years ago, give or take. We were sitting around talking about what we should do for bylaws, and whether we should jury people in or just let people join. I remember all kinds of little questions like that coming up.

From there it just evolved, with a bunch of interested people. It has been probably one of the most dynamic of the art clubs we have had in the area. People have always been enthusiastic. It just had a real dynamic to it that I didn't see in other art clubs. It has been a real good group over the years.

In terms of membership, are people allowed to join?

Oh, yes. They are not screened in. Joyce originally was thinking about having people juried in, but that went by the wayside. Now it's open to anybody who is interested.

So you have monthly meetings and a demonstration?

Actually, it's bimonthly. They have bimonthly meetings. Typically, they will have a business meeting from eleven to noon, and usually they will have a demonstration in the afternoon from about one to three.

How large is the membership?

I want to say about 180 members. They always give the number, but I let it go in one ear and out the other. I was running the newsletter there for a while. I remember getting it printed, but I can't remember how many copies. The membership has been pretty consistent over at least the last decade that I have been aware of. It was a smallish group when it first started, but it's grown. It has been pretty consistently the largest art group in Reno.

I don't know about the Nevada Artists Association. Nevada Artists Association has been around for a long time. We had a real active chapter in Reno. Matter of fact, Reno was the main club, although one point, there were chapters in several of the smaller surrounding communities. Carson City had a chapter. About four or five years ago, maybe more, membership in the local chapter just started waning and we couldn't find anybody who was willing to take on the leadership. It just fell by the wayside.

The Carson City chapter, in the meantime, has grown really strong. They have a little gallery down in Carson City now that has been a pretty successful operation. It operates an awful lot like our Co-op does. The King Street Gallery or the Brewery Art Center...I can't remember what their current title is, but they are a really active bunch down there.

Was the Nevada Artists Association similar in any way to the Watercolor Society or the Latimer Art Club in terms of meetings?

They follow pretty much the same format, except, of course, the Nevada Artists Association and the Latimer Art Club are open to all media; it is not just watercolor. That was an advantage of both of them. If you're an oil painter or acrylic painter, then you have someplace to show your work.

Where is the Sierra Watercolor Society currently meeting?

Right now we're meeting in the Education Building of the United Christian Congregationalists church up on Sunnyside Drive. I think it was Congregationalists and First Christian that got together and joined.

Have there been any significant changes with the Watercolor Society over the time that you have been involved?

Not any major changes that I'm aware of. Well, I have a few disagreements with Watercolor Society. Sierra Watercolor Society has always been a pretty traditionalist bunch. I think there has been a subtle change, but watercolor in its purest form is strictly transparent media. In recent years, there has been a trend in the art world, as far as I can

tell, to start blurring the edges of media where watercolor is not necessarily all transparent. You might put some gouache in with some watercolor, put in some acrylic in with some watercolor, maybe even put in some pastel.

I think the local group is loosening up a little bit to where they are now accepting that a piece doesn't have to be 100 percent transparent watercolor. Maybe there are some new trends that we can incorporate and accept as valid watercolor. It is a subtle change, but that has probably been the change that I've noticed most. They still have a few little quirks of framing. I like to frame one way. They want to frame another way. That is no big deal, though. [laughs]

Where are the exhibits being held, and for how long are they open?

It depends on where they are showing. They have a show coming up. There are two shows that I'm aware of that have been pretty traditional over the last eight or ten years. They have had a show in usually the spring or early summer down at the main library downtown. That is usually a month-long show. Then they have their big show, which usually takes place during the balloon races up at the Wilbur D. May Museum. That one runs just over the weekend of the balloon races from Thursday through Sunday night. That is the one where they award prizes. They have ribbons and all kinds of art goodies for prizes there.

When they can, they will have shows of opportunity. Wilbur May has been affording Watercolor Society a space, usually in January or February, in one of their rooms to display Sierra Watercolor Society work. At one point we had an ongoing display at one of the hospital's rehabilitation centers. I'm not sure if they are still doing that or not.

In Artown they will have a display out at the Renown Medical Center in South Meadows. Those are shows of opportunity. When there is an opportunity to show, they will take advantage of it and get something going. They will try to have something going every two or three months if they can.

You mentioned that the Nevada Art Association has dropped off over the last few years. Do you know the reason for that drop in membership?

Well, yes. Nevada Art Association (N.A.A.) was going along really well and had a good, strong membership. A lot of members, of course, at that time were members of the Co-op, too. There was a point when a roster of candidates for leadership came in who were not longtime established members of the group. They had some ideas that didn't go over too well with the rest of the membership. It went okay for a year or so. There were some things going on that didn't set too well, but people let it go.

There came a point when...I don't want to mention any names here, but some people in the membership thought that one of the members who was arranging for a show had manipulated the show for some reason. The leadership got really down on this member who was arranging the show. They even had her thrown out of the club, which was a major mistake. For one thing, the person in question was probably one of the most active and leadership-oriented people in that organization. When the officers decided to throw her out, an awful lot of the other people who liked her and were friends of hers left the organization, too.

That was a crippling blow, because the organization typically had a handful of people who made it run, and after they left, the club never quite recovered. It staggered along, and

finally they couldn't get anybody to volunteer to be president, treasurer, and all the different posts you need in there. They decided, "Well, okay. Let's just take our lunch and go home."

Prior to the club's dissolution, what exhibits were you able to do with the N.A.A.?

Well, the big one for the association was when Jan Douglas had River Gallery downtown. It was a really nice art gallery and very high-quality craft store in the general area of the theater complex downtown. She always had hosted our Nevada Artists Association show, usually in the fall—October or November. That was their biggest show. As a matter of fact, that was the crux of the controversy that split up the people in the club. They always had that one big show.

Then again, like Watercolor Society, the rest of the shows throughout the year were typically shows of opportunity wherever they could get a show. A lot of times they would have a spring show at some shopping mall if they could. It was just a matter of finding someplace that was willing to host it. Frequently if you had a show like that you had to have somebody there to sit around and keep an eye on things. So you needed volunteers.

When you have exhibits, how are the pieces chosen and are there any requirements for getting a piece into a show?

Most of them are open. I don't think any of our shows are juried per se. I think maybe the Watercolor Society show nominally is, but I don't know of anything that has ever been juried out.

I had something in a juried show one time, an N.A.A. show. It was a very Impressionistic, almost abstract scenic picture. At that time, the people who were running it were all

strictly into representational work, so they didn't appreciate my vision. I guess they have on occasion juried things out. As a rule, nowadays I think they can, but I don't think I've ever seen anything juried out for bad taste or for not being good enough.

What they will do sometimes is reject something because it's not framed well enough or if it doesn't have the right mounting hooks on the back. Watercolor Society has been particularly strict about putting a dust cover on the back of paintings. That is where I've gotten into kind of a disagreement with them, but I go along with it because I like to enter the shows. Having a craft-paper backing on the back of a watercolor is one of their requirements. If you don't have it, they'll jury it out, which they have. I remember them jurying out a really nice piece that Chris Urriola had one time.

That is really the only thing nowadays that will get you out of a show—not having it framed quite properly, or if it's in grossly bad taste. There are some things that just will get rejected in that case. I haven't really seen any real high jurying standards as far as quality of work goes.

Have you had any personal exhibits?

Occasionally I'll get something going. I had a one-man show down at the State Archives in Carson City a couple years back. Our little Unitarian fellowship south of town has a hallway gallery, and I've had shows out there on a number of occasions.

I've had pieces on display at the south branch of the community college, and the north branch, too. Occasionally I will put a piece in a library, or one of the campuses on the university.

In the years that you've lived in Reno, what have been some of the broader changes?

I don't know if I've seen changes other than the city getting bigger. The art venues have gotten bigger. It seems like we have always been supportive of arts, even going back to when I first came to town. Maybe we've become a little more aware of arts in the community, not just visual arts, but music. You get road shows downtown, community concerts, and a good symphony. If anything, we've just become more culturally aware. As the city has grown, I think our cultural awareness has grown.

What sort of an impact do you think that these activities have had on Reno?

We have been getting art out there for people to see. These activities provide an opportunity for artists and art hobbyists to get their artwork out there and for people to see them.

Where have you shopped for art supplies in Reno?

Originally there was only one art supply store in town: Nevada Fine Arts over on Fourth Street. You could get a few art supplies through some of the craft stores, but Nevada Fine Arts was really about it. I'm trying to remember if the university handled art supplies or not. It was pretty much Nevada Fine Arts.

Tutty Wetzel was the owner of the store down there. She was pretty good about hiring art students part-time to work for her, too. It was a pretty good outlet. She had just about everything you could need in the way of art stuff. She had probably one of the best selections of oil painting frames of any place in town. They still do. They have moved their store over onto Arroyo or Pueblo now. They still have a good supply of art supplies and art frames.

More recently, we have had the chain stores move in. There is Michaels out here, which is more about crafts than art. They have some pretty good art stuff there, though. Ben Franklin had some art supplies. The one I use almost exclusively anymore, though, is Aaron Brothers. That is mostly because I'm lazy and Aaron Brothers is only about five blocks away. They have a good supply of everything. Their prices are good. They typically have sales and you can almost always get a half-price coupon or nearly half-price coupon off the Internet from them.

Otherwise, if I'm getting something in quantity or something they don't have locally, I'll go to catalogues like Jerry's Art-o-Rama or Dick Blick. A lot of people like Cheap Joe's, but I'm not a big fan of Cheap Joe's.

BARBARA LAND

Allison Tracy: To start out, can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Barbara Land: I was born in a small town in western Pennsylvania called Aliquippa, and it is known for its athletes—people like Mike Ditka and Tony Dorsett. All these major athletes have come from this small western town. It was a steel city. There was a total mixed groupings of culture, from the many Eastern European ethnic groups to a very large African American group. It was just your typical small East Coast town right outside of Pittsburgh. It was about forty-five minutes from downtown Pittsburgh.

Can you tell me a little bit about what your parents did?

My parents were first generation.... They both were born in Yugoslavia, so I'm first generation. My father was a steelworker, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. I have a brother who lives in Pittsburg. They were

awesome, and it's just like the June Cleaver... there's nothing you can say. It was really the perfect childhood. I still see my high school girlfriends. I go home three times a year, and most of them have not left the area. It's interesting—in that little pocket, they've kind of stayed there in the area. I have very strong ties to home still.

Do you remember what schools you went to growing up?

Aliquippa. Aliquippa Elementary School, Aliquippa Junior High, and Aliquippa Senior High.

In the town that you lived in, do you remember there being a lot of cultural activities or organizations?

It's interesting, because cultural activities were mainly wrapped around the church, whether it be Serbian or Catholic. I'm half Serbian and half Croatian, which is a funny mix because they go to war and hate each

other. We would go to the Sunday picnic at the Serbian park, and listen to the music.

By the age of three I danced, and my mother and father took me to dance classes. That's how I started at the age of three. There was no such thing as arts and culture in my hometown, though—just a local dance school whose director was actually very famous.

Really, when I moved to Pittsburgh as a young dancer, that opened my eyes. If you weren't wrapped around some sort of religious or spiritual event, there wasn't much to do. May Day was a big thing, because I'm Catholic. There were a lot of the activities from the Catholic Church, the Serbian Church, and communal festivals. St. Rocco Day, a local patron saint, was a huge community thing and it was a big picnic.

For the dance classes that you took, was there just a community member teaching the classes?

No, he's actually... I didn't appreciate really who he was. His name was Ronnie Matty, and he was a very famous tapper who went on and taught everything—ballet, tap dancing, and a little bit of jazz dancing. I studied with him for a long time until I went on to Pittsburgh. We learned everything and I liked everything until it was realized I just had the right body for ballet. They saw something in me, and so I started studying professionally in Pittsburgh.

So how old were you when you moved to Pittsburgh?

Well, actually, I didn't. I did not move to Pittsburgh; I took classes there. We drove back and forth to Pittsburgh. I actually moved to Pittsburgh when I graduated from high school.

Who were you studying with?

The Pittsburgh Ballet at that time was affiliated with Point Park College in Pittsburgh, which now I'm very happy to say is second only to Juilliard. It's a very wonderful school of dance.

So you went to Point Park then for college?

I did. It's more of a conservatory. If you look at every major dance company we've brought to Reno, like Ballet Hispanico, or Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, for every one of them, probably one quarter of the dancers are from Point Park in Pittsburgh. Point Park is known for its ballet training. It's the most amazing ballet.

We studied Russian classical ballet. The great Russian dancers and teachers flocked to Pittsburgh. All the famous dancers were defecting from Russia. A lot of them came to Pittsburgh, so that put us on the map. I was studying what is called the Vaganova Ballet Method. It was the only one you could hear about. It was the most famous ballet syllabus in the world. All of my teachers could not speak a word of English. We were drinking vodka and smoking cigarettes when I was thirteen years old. [laughs] You just did it. That's what you did.

Economically, Pittsburgh and the town that you grew up, how were they doing at that time?

It was a thriving steel mill city, and the mills were up and operational. Now it's a ghost town—very sad. My dad had a good living, and we never, ever wanted for anything. We could dance. We could do whatever we wanted to do.

I look back... it was a much simpler life. I could never live like that now. My children have never lived like that. When you don't have, you don't want. Dance was very

expensive, and my parents saved. I remember my mother hiding money underneath her mattress to support my dance habit.

You just did it. It's just like today—every little girl goes to ballet class on Saturday. It's just something little girls do. I never asked my mother why she did it, but I'm assuming because everybody else was doing it. I stopped for a while. I remember her telling me as a four-year-old I quit, and at the age of like five or six, we picked it back up and there was never any looking back after that.

How long did you study at Point Park?

My training at Point Park is a very interesting story. Back then, if you would have said something about a homosexual, my father would have had no idea. He didn't understand dance. Other than all my aunts and uncles coming from Steubenville to watch my recitals or watch me dance, it was like he didn't understand it. When I graduated from high school and was dancing at Point Park in their conservatory program, I went on and got a three-year nursing degree as a registered nurse, because my dad was just determined that dancing would be not anything I would ever do. I danced at night, went to school all day long, and graduated with a degree in nursing that I never did anything with it. So I kind of had that dual life.

Then I went to school in England, actually. I went to Point Park and danced with the ballet company and did what I did, but that's later on.

For ballet dancers in my era and in my generation, there were camps. The ballet dancers were a set of dancers, and then the modern dancers were a set of dancers. We didn't even share studios. I hate to admit this, but still today the ballet dancer would say that the only reason you're a modern

dancer is because you don't have the talent, you don't have the body type, or you don't want to work hard. [Modern dancers] go put bare feet on and dance around, whereas ballet dancers take three to four ballet classes a day and rehearse all weekend and our feet are.... I was in that snobbery. I was that ballet snob and stayed that way all the way through my life, actually, until I left Reno. It's terrible. I came here with that attitude.

I ended up coming here because I was married to a physician. I married a doctor, and I came here to UNR 1979 and said to Keith Loper, "I want to study ballet." I was looking for ballet. I showed up and I knew there was dance, and I said, "I want to do ballet."

He looked at me and laughed and said, "What's ballet?"

And I said, "Coach..." He was Dr. Loper, the chair of Recreation and Physical Education at that time.

He said, "If you want to do ballet, why don't you teach it?" I started the ballet program here in 1979.

Going back, where in England were you studying?

The Royal Academy College in London. The point I was making about that was the colleges here in America for dance were designed for modern dancers. It was about creating dances and finding yourself. The academic vision for the modern dancer was clean and it was great. For us in ballet, though, we felt you should be on the stage of the Met or you should be on the stage of Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts. What are you going to college for? You're a ballet dancer and you dance. So there weren't any college opportunities. Even if there were, if you decided to do it, where would a ballet

dancer like myself go? There wasn't any place for me.

So I went to the Royal Academy College in England to further study my teaching. That happened here. I decided that I was here at the university, was going to teach dance, and needed to get the terminal MFA degree in dance at that point. I did that in England.

It's an interesting point, the idea that with modern dance there was an academic aspect—you take classes in it—whereas ballet was more focused on...

Doing. It was stereotypical. I thought, "Why would I want to go to college? I want to perform *Giselle*. I want to dance in the great halls in the world. Why would I want to go to school? All I want to do is teach dance, and that comes from experience and having great teachers and knowing all the great major ballets." There was no educational support for me for what I wanted to do, because ballet was basically left out of the curriculum in college dance, and that was for a very long time. Of course, now it's not like that. It's wonderful. There are a lot of master's programs in ballet.

How did you first get involved at UNR?

Well, I wanted to take a dance class, because I had come from a college situation, so I hadn't been in a private studio since I was a child. I came here thinking that I would be able to take ballet classes and there weren't any, and Keith Loper said, "You teach them. If you want to take ballet, I can't do that. You will need to teach them yourself."

Then at that point, Coach Loper he gave me one class a week, and it started. I was a Letter of Appointment—an LOA. That was in 1979. It caught on because there really was not

much ballet. There was little studio stuff, but here was this dancer from Pittsburgh, fresh off the stage.

Then, of course, Maggie Banks was here—the great Maggie Banks. The great Maggie Banks was here teaching in a studio, and she was working with the opera at that time. I was here at the college, and it bloomed. It bloomed beyond belief. I taught almost full-time up here on a one-credit LOA payment. I mean, I built it. I brought something from nothing.

Then, of course, then came the performance side. We started a little dance company up here called the University Ballet Theatre. We did three years of full ballet performance. It was interesting, because the problem of the modern dancer and the ballet dancer was here.

Then as time went on, Kristen Avansino left. We brought another modern dancer in. I'm doing my own ballets, and she's doing her own thing. I would see the work that she was doing and be totally embarrassed. I'd look at that work and just say, "Oh, my god." She had students who were not ready to perform, and I didn't think she was that talented. I won't use her name. She's not here anymore. We had camps, though, even here. The ballet people were doing their thing and they were studying three to four days a week, and these modern dancers were running around the stage looking stupid.

Then as time went on, obviously, that person left and modern dance became very sophisticated with Martina Young, and that's probably the biggest name.... She came in here and just brought modern dance where it needed to be. I saw her do a residency. I watched her, I heard her talk, and I said, "This is the gal for me. I think she will do with modern dance what I've done to ballet. Ballet's strong." And she did. She was here for four to five years.

So when you started then, was Kristin the only dance instructor?

She was here maybe one year, and it was just the two of us. I met with Loper, and *Hello Hollywood* opened that year, so I said, "Let's bring jazz in. Let's bring jazz." What happened was all the dancers that were in *Hello Hollywood* started teaching in the community, and they also started coming here and taking classes. We had this great wealth of wonderful dancers, beyond belief, on campus. They were some of the finest dancers in the world, and they were here doing this show.

Beyond the involvement with the dancers coming to UNR, were you involved in the production?

No, but I went once a month, because a lot of the dancers danced with me. It was always great fun for them to know that Miss Barbara was in the house. I'd yell at them, or we'd have parties at my house. They'd get off work and I'd open Lombardi at two o'clock in the morning and we'd go swimming.

Can you me what was the show like?

Oh, my god, it was wonderful. It was the grandest dance show this country has ever seen. I don't know if, even in Vegas, anything can compare to it, from the huge Boeing airplane that came on.... This was the world's largest stage, even today I think. They had vignettes. They did a tribute to San Francisco, and then all of a sudden the costumes, the singing, the dancing.... All of a sudden the earthquake would happen and things would crumble. They did a takeoff on monsters, and they played *Night on Bald Mountain*, and these dancers were dressed up. Then all of a

sudden, they had waterfalls. Then they did a space odyssey number.

It's interesting. They still had what was called the black boy line and the white boy line, and they did not share a dressing room. The black boys had their own dressers and their own room, and the white boys had their own. This was still in 1979 in Reno.

Was it one set show, or did the numbers change over the years?

It was all these little vignettes for two hours, and it stayed just as it was for a long time, maybe about ten years. It was a ten-year run, and it was packed almost every night. The costumes were gorgeous. The singers and a lot of those dancers stayed when that show [ended], like my partner at the ballet studio right now, Miriam Allen, who is co-director of the ballet school. They were all brought here for *Hello Hollywood*. When that show left, they stayed. Miriam and I have been partners at the ballet school for twenty-five years.

Do you remember how much did it cost, or what was the audience like?

It was like any Reno-Vegas show. I mean, for a price of two drinks, you could probably see a show. So probably for twenty-five bucks, if that, you could see the show and you got drinks. It ran almost six nights a week, two shows on the weekends.

In a broader sense, what sort of impact do you feel like the show had on Reno?

Reno had never seen anything like that—the sets, the costumes. It was so well thought out. In Reno, we'd come from that so-called gilded, golden age when you had Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., and all

those type of entertainers here—these kind of crooners. Then all of a sudden you get this stage show that just exploded the art circle in Reno, and it lent to the other ones. Harrah's had all of their shows. Oh, my god, [they were] little tiny versions, but the dancers were wonderful. They were all bluebells—showgirls from England. They all came from England and France and South America. I mean, entertainment really came. Extravaganza came with that show. It was a thrill, just a thrill.

The thing of it is the singers and the dancers were top rate. Mr. Fredrick Apkin, the producer, came once a year to twice a year and did a cattle call. All the dancers had to march across the stage in bikinis and get on a scale. It was the cattle call, and they all dreaded it. He wanted his showgirls, the costumes, the hats, and the stairs... everything you could think about dance or Las Vegas extravaganza was in that show.

Was there a vignette that you especially liked?

Yes. It was called *Smoke in Your Eyes*, and it was a beautiful ballet—gorgeous. The dancer was Greg Glodowski, and he is now an attorney here in town. He and I danced together in the Pittsburgh Ballet. Then [there was] Leslie Bandy, the great Leslie Bandy, who was a beautiful ballet dancer. It was a showstopper. They were so good, and I liked that because it was real, pure dance. Then, of course, you had to like the space number, when they had the aliens. Oh, it was wonderful. I could not pick a vignette. They were all wonderful, and very well rehearsed.

Do you have any sense of why the show ended?

I think it ran its course. I think that after so long it fizzled, and I think once it fizzled....

I say the day the Mouseketeer died which is kind of one of my things I talked about. There was a time in history when all these people died at one time. The day the dance died in Reno was the day that show closed, because then no longer do we have Harrah's and their cabarets. They were running cabarets side by side with *Hello Hollywood*—big, beautiful shows. People went every single night. You couldn't get into those shows. When *Hello Hollywood* died though, dance died in Reno, and we've never recovered from it.

The whole environment of gambling and that type of environment died around that time as well. It just all collapsed at the same time, and dance went along with it.

Can you tell me more about dance in Reno outside the casinos?

Maggie Banks was here. Maggie Banks co-choreographed *West Side Story* with Jerome Robbins. She worked with Andy Williams, Marilyn Monroe, and all these wonderful people. She retired here in Reno. All the MGM dancers studied with her too. She used the professional show dancers when she started working with Nevada Opera and the great Ted Puffer. Those were her dancers. She used that pool of *Hello Hollywood* dancers. From working with Nevada Opera came the very first *Nutcracker*. So, our very first ballet company was funded in body by *Hello Hollywood*. They were our first professional dancers. They danced the shows at night, but during the matinees, they put pointe shoes on and they were as good as any ballet dancer you would have seen in any major ballet company. They were our first dancers. When we see permanent professional ballet, permanent professional dance, it was that group of dancers. There's a wonderful documentary out there about the making of *Hello Hollywood*

and everything about that show. It was narrated by Leslie Bandy. If you ever get a chance to watch it, oh, it's wonderful.

When Hello Hollywood left and this source of dancers dried up who were these companies in Reno using for dancers?

Of course, at that point, what had happened is Nevada Festival Ballet....I was one of the people that stepped up, and I worked up here in teaching. I said, "All right, Maggie, I'm going to help you." We developed the first professional ballet company—Nevada Festival Ballet. I wrote the 501©3 status. So once we got the 501(c)3 status Maggie got her the ballet company. She had a school.

So what was happening is once this new energy of dance came along with *Hello Hollywood*, then we started seeing our own homegrown dancers stepping up to the plate. At one time, they were only the fillers, and now they were becoming the dancers. So we were training our own dancers to take those roles.

Do you remember when Nevada Festival Ballet was getting started?

I would say 1985 is when Nevada Festival Ballet really got up and running. I was on the board. I'd go down there and sell tickets. Those of us who wanted to see a real ballet company worked really hard. We really did. We really worked hard to make that thing go. Maggie was one of my best friends in the whole world.

Can you tell me a little bit about performances you remember Nevada Festival putting on?

We brought in the biggest names in ballet. Since Maggie was with American Ballet Theatre in her youth, she still had ties to

America's largest ballet company, and so we would bring in the stars of American Ballet Theatre to perform in our ballets. So I'm talking about the people from the big movie *The Turning Point*. They got off the stage and came to Reno and performed. We did things like have Waddie Mitchell, the great cowboy poet, to narrate *Billy the Kid*. I mean, we had just amazing dancers, and I think that's the thing that sold that ballet company. We did *Sleeping Beauty*. We brought the best Beauty from Russia, the best Aurora.

Reno's a funny town. They don't like new and experimental things, so Maggie had a tendency of doing the classics, and we did all the classics. We did *Copellias* and *Giselles*. What she did was very smart. At Christmastime, she got all the old professional dancers in town to be in *Nutcracker*. All of us, including the Miriams and all the other dancers in town, became the parents in the *Nutcracker*. Here you had all these dancers teaching dance, but now we're all on the stage performing. It was delightful, and it was a beautiful version of *Nutcracker*. She did them all. I mean, experimental ones just do not go. She would try something new, and we'd play for half a house.

Then as time went on, boards have a tendency of stepping in, and they stepped on Maggie's toes one too often. I'll never forget her saying, "Barbara, I am resigning. I'm not retiring." She is in her seventies, right? I have to unfortunately say that at that point that company started without Maggie at the helm. She was the company. I brought her here to UNR every spring and she choreographed for me for the last five, six years of her life.

While the Nevada Festival was up and running, where were you rehearsing and performing?

The Nevada Festival Ballet was its own entity. They had a huge school over on Fourth

Street. She started out in a little warehouse, and then finally with a stronger board and more money.... We had people like Moya Lear, who was a big funder of Maggie. Anybody and everybody that had money in the 1980s or the 1990's, funded Maggie. We'd go to Moya Lear's house as the board, and all her butlers would have their white gloves on. All the names were associated with the Nevada Festival Ballet—Juliet Prowse, Ann-Margaret, and Rollan Melton.

I remember Dr. Charlie Bullock, chair of health ecology, calling me. I was doing something. My office was over there [in Lombardi Recreation Center] at that time, and Charlie calls me and says, "Barbara, please, can I ask you a question?"

And I said, "Sure. What's up, Charlie?"

"Please don't tell me Juliet Prowse is running around this building."

I said, "Oh, no, she's not. She's sitting right here in my office, actually."

So we had these movie stars that Maggie knew that came in support of the ballet and did fundraisings for us like Ann-Margaret. Maggie was godmother to Juliet Prowse's son, and when she lost Juliet, she never recovered. It was kind of one of those things that just killed Mags.

What other fundraising did you do?

I wrote the grants personally. I had decided that up here I wanted to train dancers and I wanted to do my shows up here, but that little stint where I was doing the little professional ballet company thing, which I was doing— For three years we did these full-length evening ballets. I just didn't want to do it. I felt that I was going to take my energy and work with Maggie, and so I committed myself to her. So, I had more the academic kind of training for the university student here and

then worked with Maggie seriously in the formation of our professional ballet company.

So, grants and fundraisers... every time we turned around, there was some fundraising event, and they worked. Maggie was credible to pull \$10,000. She had the background. She had the talent.

In terms of grants, what organizations were you writing grants to?

All the biggies. There's a lot of foundations that have been given money locally. I don't think the city of Reno was doing their grants at that time, but the Nevada Arts Council supported Maggie from day one.

What sort of things were those grants funding?

Dancers' pay. The school that she had had a profit part in it, so the school really supported the company. That's kind of a lesson that every major ballet company... ballets are very expensive. Like opera, they're expensive to produce. You need an arm, and the arm was the school. She had such a large school that it paid a lot of bills of the ballet company. That was another secret of her success.

So the school would train people locally, and the ballet company would use some local people, but would bring in professional dancers.

Yes. Every ballet school has two focuses. The little girl who wants to do ballet on a Saturday but doesn't stand a chance, nor wants to become a dancer, are the ones who pay the bill. They're the ones whose Daddy pays \$40 a month to have his little daughter do a recital. Then there's that serious dancer who dances five days a week in hopes of either performing with the ballet company or moving on. In fact, Maya Wilkins, who's the star of Joffrey

Ballet Company, was one of those kids. She is coming to perform in our concert this year. She's a very famous ballet dancer, but she chose the route. She didn't dance too much for Nevada Festival Ballet, but she got her training with Maggie and then went off to the Joffrey Ballet.

In terms of performances, were you also performing in that space on Fourth Street?

No, she did all of her performing at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts. That was just her school. She started the Lawlor Events Center Children's Show where she started bringing in school students to see free dance events. In fact, I picked this all up at her death. The ballet company would have one performance a year that was kind of diverse or it was professional. We brought a major ballet company in or someone like the Lakota Sioux, and they would perform in Reno. We'd do it as a fundraiser, and then we'd also give the children a free show at Lawlor Events Center—dance in the schools. Maggie started that. Actually, I helped her with all of that.

That was outreach that the ballet did?

Yes, but we were all smart about making money. When the ballet company was at its height, it was never in the red. It was always in the black. We were just all creative and we all wanted it to go, and there was no egos. Maggie was the boss, and we just did whatever we could to help her do what she did. She did a great job.

How many students would you say the school side of it had enrolled at any given time?

Oh, god, lots. They had tons of students, because they paid all the bills. That school

would pay all the company bills, so there were two to three hundred students, probably.

Besides Maggie and you, who were other people who were working for the ballet,?

Diane Guest-Hoff has Nevada Dance Academy, and she's from that genre. She came from that *Hello Hollywood* group. She's a Cecchetti teacher and started teaching Cecchetti and opened up her own school. Her school is still strong today.

What's interesting about dance in Reno is they come and they go. There's been a lot of teachers that have started teaching, and none of them really tagged on with Maggie because they can't afford to. They're trying to open their own school. I could, because I was up here and there was nothing up here for me. I wasn't making money in all this business. There's a lot of teachers that are here still that come from that. I don't think any of them really tied themselves, other than maybe Diane Guest-Hoff.

Typically were a lot of people going to the Festival Ballet performances? Were they popular in Reno?

Yes, they were very popular if she did something that was recognizable. She stopped doing the more avant-garde stuff. She knew she couldn't sell tickets, and she was a very good businesswoman. So, yes, her ballets were full. We'd do *Nutcracker* at the Grand Sierra in the showroom. I don't know how many seats are in there, but maybe 1,800. They'd sell out. There wouldn't be a seat left.

Do you remember the cost?

For a ticket? This is also the time when dance was really big in all the movies. There

were all the movies like the *Flashdance*, and *The Wiz*. Dance was really kind of the art form, so the popularity in film spilled over to the stage. You probably could go to the ballet for ten or fifteen dollars.

Can you tell me a little bit about how the ballet was involved in Artown, during that time when they overlapped?

Oh, god, Maggie hated Artown. She went kicking and screaming. They said to her, “Maggie.” This was one thing she really was opposed to. I knew her well enough so I did not tell her this. Her board did, and said, “Maggie, you need to do a performance in the park.”

She said, “I am not doing it so all these bums can pull out their booze and drink.” That’s really what Artown was when it started. That’s when Maggie was at her height, and she just said, “I’m not doing it. I’m not doing it.” They would do performances down there in Winfield Park. It was not the entity it is right now, so she went kicking and screaming. She had very little involvement with Artown.

Now, the next breed, the next people who took over Artown started being a little.... Maggie then had retired and had left. She was here with me. Then Beth McMillan, who is the executive director of Artown right now, took over the ballet company. Actually, first it was Leslie Bandy, the famous dancer. That didn’t work out, so then Beth McMillan came in. With her involvement with Artown, she started co-producing events in the name of the ballet company for Artown— Nevada Festival Ballet in conjunction with Artown brings in Joffrey Ballet. That’s actually probably one of the things that killed the ballet company, because now at this point it’s losing money. We can’t here at the university afford to be a

sponsor. It’s very expensive bringing these companies in, and that’s one of the things that was the demise of the ballet company.

Do you remember when the ballet closed its doors?

No. It hung on. Maggie has been gone... I’m going to say it has been about eight or nine years. They were completely gone by then when she passed on, which was about five to six years ago. It was just a fragment. It was nothing.

Were they still running the school at that point?

They were trying to, but they didn’t have teachers. There was all this dissent. Her teachers pulled away from her and the school, and they started another entity. You have a bad feeling—I say the bad juju—that was coming out of there. The teachers wanting to go off and do their own thing. The school crashed.

Was this still when Maggie was there, or is this after she had left?

Actually, the first revolt happened when Maggie was there. She had a person working for her in her office that wanted to do something different and wanted to take the company in a new direction. Nevada Festival had a huge outreach program for indigent children. They would go there and dance. Somewhere along the line, they picked up all those indigent children and they went off and started another kind of entity, and it caused so much dissent. If things don’t run smoothly, it collapses. That’s the way it is in this kind of dance world, and I think that was the other thing that killed the company.

During the time that you were really involved in Nevada Festival Ballet, were there any general shifts over time or changes compared to how it was when it started?

The main thing was a pull from Nevada Opera, because Maggie was the choreographer for Nevada Opera. That's how she started putting dance...for the first time, there was dance and opera, and Maggie did that. Then all of a sudden, Ted Puffer got it into his head.... It was Nevada Opera Presents the *Nutcracker*.

Maggie started there, and somewhere under the umbrella of the opera, he said, "Well, maybe I'll do an opera that's really dancing." So all of a sudden, it caught on that here's all these wonderful dancers dancing in these operas. Maggie said, "Wait a minute. You're keeping all the money. I'm doing all the work. This is a ballet company." It started with *Nutcracker*. She picked up the *Nutcracker* and self-produced it. Once that was established in town, then Nevada Festival grew from that. So it was Nevada Opera.

That it started out as.

Yes. What's interesting with that is when Maggie left Nevada Opera it lost all of its dance until I came along and revitalized dance and opera. We may even have a dance company coming out of Nevada Opera—Nevada Opera Dancers.

When Maggie picked up the dance part of it and started Nevada Festival Ballet, was there any tension between her and Opera?

Yes, there was. Maggie and the Puffers were family. I think towards the end, they reconciled. They had to. It did for a while,

though it was very, very sad, because they were such good friends, and she had so few friends. She really did. She was a feisty character. Either she liked you or she didn't. She liked very few people. Take five in her hand, and I was one of the five.

How did Maggie come to Reno?

She actually came here to retire. She had choreographed. She was at the Lake doing some choreography. Harrah's in Lake Tahoe at that time had all the big-namers coming there, and she was there doing something and just decided, because she did the Andy Williams show, she did *West Side Story*...she did all these things, and she just said, "I don't want to do it anymore. I just want to go and open up a little place and teach dance." So she retired, and lo and behold, she didn't retire but got a whole new career out of all of this.

How did you meet Maggie?

I go back to when she was still doing things with the Opera. I was the ballet person here. I went and introduced myself. I called her and said, "Hey, it's me. I'm in town."

I'll never forget, she said "So?" [laughter] "So?"

"Oh, okay, Maggie." Then I just kind of kept showing up at her shows or sending students to her, and then we just became great friends.

Can you tell me how you got involved in Nevada Opera?

Well, the great Ted Puffer taught here at UNR, and he probably made his salary here. He ate and lived off the money from UNR and then started the Nevada Opera. When Maggie

and he fell out, there was no longer dancing in Opera anymore. He called me up, and I was at UNR, and he said, "Barbara, I'm doing *Amahl and the Night Visitors* here on campus for the university. Would you consider doing a dance number?"

Other than doing some things with the Pittsburgh Opera... I said, "Huh. Well, okay." I went down there and I did something for him for *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. It was just really good because it kind of changed, actually, the relationship between music and dance on campus more than anything else. There was a terrible split. There was never any collaboration with music and dance and art. We all had our separate things, and we just never did anything together. So then that kind of started...

He was still the director of the Nevada Opera at that time. I did not do anything for Nevada Opera. Then he left and went to New York City and taught at some major conservatory.

Nevada Opera at that point got Robin Stampler. I don't think there was anybody before then. Robin had just come from some major company somewhere where there was dance. You can't do operas without dance. My best friend, Steve Meyer, who's now executive director of Nevada Opera, said, "Well, there's only one person in town you need to go to." That was twelve years ago. He said, "You need to call her up." He calls me up and said, "Will you do *HMS Pinafore* for me?"

So I went in, and it was like I got the bug. At that point I was just working with the chorus. Here's these people from Reno singing for free in the chorus, and I started teaching them to dance. All of a sudden, I set *HMS Pinafore*. I looked at these people, and I thought, "Oh, my god, Barbara, you're good at this. They look wonderful." I got the opera bug. Of course, all of a sudden this is now a

change, because there's actually a movement person doing something with the opera.

Then it was only natural progression. He calls me and asks, "Well, okay, that worked really well. Would you do *Traviata* for me? Would you bring dancers?" So I brought two dancers and we performed. They stood alone. They danced in *Traviata*, or they went home. Well, that started it. All of a sudden Nevada Opera had dancers again, and the audience love it.

We've done everything from twenty-one dances in *Merry Widow* to *Aida*. I think what they've gotten with me, not to toot my own horn here, is that I'm a historian. When I did *Aida*, and I could remember the principals like Hope Briggs saying to me, "That's the most amazing *Aida* I've ever seen." She just came off the stage at the Met in New York. What is it? Well, I went and took plates and I studied hieroglyphs, so all of my dances are historically correct. If I'm going to do *Merry Widow*, they're going to do a waltz like they were doing in 1890. They're not going to do what we're doing today. I did a minuet from the time of Louis XIV in *Orpheus and the Underworld*. I reconstructed a minuet from the time of Louis XIV in the 1600s.

I just recently got a letter saying we have a fan club now, and they want to see more dancing. They really try now to put in their performance a danced opera. Opera is hard though.

Then Robin left and Michael Borowitz came. The economy hits opera really hard because it's expensive to do. I hear the last show they did this weekend just did not go. There's two things... Reno has a problem with experimental works. They did *Vanessa*, and just like with Maggie.... Right now, the ballet company is A.V.A. Ballet Theatre. I was just talking to on the phone with Alex [from A.V.A.]. He does *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*,

Cinderella, and *Nutcracker*. He does the same repertoire over and over. He's now doing for the first time *Secret Garden*. Alex said, "Barbara, I'm not going to do a show and dance to an empty house and make my doors close."

The problem with Nevada Opera is once or twice a year they do one of these works. Just like with the dances, they're not recognizable and no one comes. I think they're in a bit of financial problem right now. They have nine lives, though. Nevada Opera is always able to pop up. We're a big opera community. Reno loves opera if it's recognizable like *Carmen* or *Aida*. *Marriage of Figaro* is coming up.

What are the big operas that draw a lot of people?

Merry Widow, Der Fledermaus, Aida, Carmen, Pagliacci, Lucia di Lammermoor, Marriage of Figaro and, of course, Gilbert and Sullivan—*HMS Pinafore, Pirates of Penzance*. I've done them all. In fact, actually, they decided to do a concert, and they brought in *Aida*—Hope Briggs—to do a whole evening concert. A quarter of the show was choreographed by me, and I did the Polovtsian dances from *Prince Igor*, which really now has opened the door for university students. UNR students now get to perform on the stage of Pioneer Center with Maestro Borowitz playing and a hundred singer singers. What a high is that? I donate all my fees to Nevada Opera, so I don't charge them at all.

Nevada Opera, for the larger roles, brings in stars?

Yes. The chorus and some of the minor solo parts get done by locals. It's expensive.

Do you have any sense of what Nevada Opera's funding sources are?

There's a lot of big foundations out there. You're talking about the E.L. Cord Foundation. They go to the state and they go to the city, but then they have the flexibility to go to donors that we can't up here at UNR. Some of the big foundations they go to...Cord is a big one. They give the opera lots of money. Carol Bucksell gives them a lot of money. So, they get a lot of foundation support.

Who attends these opera performances and how accessible are they?

They're more expensive, I think for my UNR students and for students in the community, we are invited to dress on Wednesday night. They can go for free. There is a student rush. Every arts organization is accommodating for this economy and they're making it affordable. I don't think there's anybody in this town that does want to see an opera who cannot afford ten or twelve dollars, because you can probably get in to the opera. Or you wait five minutes before curtain, run in there and pay ten bucks and get a hundred-dollar seat.

There's an opera audience. There are a pool of people that are the opera buffs. A lot of them came to the Nevada Festival Ballet. I think the new ballet crowd is not the opera crowd, which I know because I go.

Do you have a sense of the type of person that makes up a ballet crowd versus an opera crowd?

Oh, I always tell my students to come to the opening night of the opera to see who's who of Reno. It's fun. You get dressed up and you put your jewels on. It's the place to be, and I think it still is. The opening night of an opera is a Friday night. It's the place to be.

I think your ballet crowd, because I know who goes to A.V.A.'s performances...I won't

say they don't go as well, but you're going to see a mom with all of her kids. Every little girl wants to go see *Sleeping Beauty* or *Swan Lake*. It's more children oriented. I think it's more child-friendly.

They pay the bills, don't they? It's that little darling, that little three-year-old who wants to tap dance on a Saturday morning. They're the ones who's going to pay the electric bill, not the professional aspiring ballet dancer dancing six days a week. She doesn't pay the bills.

Is A.V.A. Ballet similar to Nevada Ballet Festival is where they have a school and a conservatory?

No, and that's interesting. A.V.A.—Alex Van Alstyne—was a member of *Hello Hollywood*, and he used to take ballet from me. He said to me one day, "Would you coach me for the San Francisco Ballet?"

I said, "Sure." So I worked with Alex and I coached Alex. He's a beautiful ballet dancer. Oh, my god. So he went off. He's danced with Boston Ballet, Ballet West, San Francisco Ballet and all these others, and finally came back to Reno and said, "I like it here. I want to settle down."

I own the Conservatory Movement. It's a children's ballet school. I really don't do much with it other than give free...Miriam, my partner in the ballet school, tells me I make it the soup kitchen. For my part I give scholarships away to every little girl who can't dance. Of course, I teach all my Nevada Opera people there. I teach alumni there. It's probably the largest professional ballet class in town that I do twice a week and all the ballet company members dance.

So this school, is the unofficial home of A.V.A. Ballet Theatre. It's not *the* official school of A.V.A., but that's where Alex

rehearses. That's where Alex does everything he does.

It stems back from our friendship, because when he came back to town, he started teaching for me there. He started teaching at UNR for me. Alex is a very bright, talented young man. Is he like Maggie? No, he's not Maggie. Nobody's Maggie. He's from a different generation. You can't compare. They're like apple and oranges, and the companies are like apple and oranges.

Where does the Nevada Opera rehearse?

As their choreographer, we use the Conservatory. It is down on Plumb Lane, right next to Shenanigan's and Scruples. It's downstairs. It's in between the check cashing place and the Hewitt tax place right there on the corner. Downstairs is the Conservatory, right next to Shenanigan's. I rehearse there, and now there are a group of dancers who are considered Nevada Opera dancers, and so every Tuesday night they come to class. Most of them are alums from UNR, so they dance alongside A.V.A. Ballet. I am one of the primary coaches for A.V.A. The Conservatory is their home. That's where they do all their rehearsing. It's not official, because he does not want to alienate the other dance schools in town. Everybody gets very territorial that way. If you go to the Conservatory, then you're hurting some little girl who may want to do a *Nutcracker*, but a teacher won't let her come because she's afraid they are going to quit her school and join the Conservatory. That's not the case.

How long have you had the Conservatory?

Twenty-five years. Miriam and I have been teaching there for twenty-five years. I started it because I, as a professional ballet dancer,

was getting strangled with the twenty-year-old student who wanted to take beginning ballet. I said, "This is not what I spent my whole life doing. I'm a class act here. I've spent my life studying with the greatest ballet teachers in the world. You're killing me. I can't just do this. I need to train ballet dancers." That was why I started it. It was a place for me to train dancers, and I have. I've got three or four students that are total stars right now out there working, that studied from me.

Your involvement with the opera and now with A.V.A., is that something that you do with or through your conservatory?

For Nevada Opera, no, because most of the dancers from Nevada Opera are UNR students. I would say Nevada Opera is linked to UNR. A.V.A. is linked to the Conservatory, and I take no money from the Conservatory. Everything I do is gratis. I go down there and I rehearse because I like the space much better. There's no mixing, though. There's no conflict of interest here. Nothing from the Conservatory filters into the University. They're separate, and I've kept it that way. In fact, most of the people around here probably don't even know I own the Conservatory, because I can't alienate all the dance teachers in town. They need to send their kids up here to me, and they do. I would say that's one thing I've always tried to do—be the peacemaker. There's not one school in this town that I can't call that the teacher's not my friend.

I wanted to ask you about the Nutcracker performances. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Oh, dear. That about threw Maggie over the edge. Well, once Nevada Festival Ballet

was on its last legs.... One of the reasons why people do *Nutcracker* which has nothing to do with maintaining the tradition or the art form is to make money. It's a Christmas classic. So every little school in Reno that's started calling themselves a company started doing their own local versions of *Nutcracker*. Not only was that a problem with Maggie, that is a very big problem with me, because I picked up where Maggie left off with the dance in the schools. I said that if a child is going to get one chance of seeing dance in his life, it's going to be the best that it can be. So with every major company that's come through, I paid for these kids to be imprinted in their head be seeing a wonderful company.

In the name of making a buck or two, these local dance schools were tainting these children. They were putting little girls on stage and they were calling...if you want to call it a recital, you have my blessing, but don't call it a professional performance of the *Nutcracker*. And they were. Everybody was flocking to them, and you were going to five or six different versions of the *Nutcracker*. They were all nothing but dance school recitals, though.

The first thing was happening was audience members were leaving saying, "I'm never seeing dance again. That's dance? That sure doesn't look like dance." We're in Reno... because we're in Reno, Nevada, it doesn't mean we're going to put crap on the stage and get away with it.

It has gotten better. You've got A.V.A. now. There was even a point though when they were bringing in Oakland Ballet to do *Nutcracker*. They were bringing the Moscow people in. Why do you need to do that? Why not support a company that's bringing in fine ballet dancers and utilizing local people? All you're doing is watering down the *Nutcracker*. It's a little bit better, but it's not to where it needs to be. We need one *Nutcracker*.

A.V.A. works with Reno Philharmonic, so they're *the Nutcracker*, but there's still other versions out there. The bad thing is some of these smaller versions are going on tour. They're taking this stuff that's not ready to be called a professional performance and they're exposing rural Nevada to it.

That really gets my goat, because that's not where I came from. When you do that, you are insulting the tradition that I grew up in and what I dedicated fifty years of my life to. That's not why I never went to a prom, had my children in between semesters of the university, ripped my hamstring off, and carried a crutch, and taught with a hamstring completely ripped in half. I didn't do that for crap. I did it for perfection and standards of excellence in the art form. As you can tell, I'm very passionate about that, because you're talking about our future dance audiences.

In Reno, who has put on the better Nutcracker performances over the years?

Maggie through Nevada Festival Ballet.

That's with the Nevada Opera, also right?

Right. What the *Nutcracker* looked like with Nevada Opera, because Maggie took all the sets and scenery of *Hello Hollywood*... you can imagine that huge stage with all these glorious.... It was so funny, because we were wearing the showgirl gowns. We'd all go on a diet. They did this whole San Francisco vignette where you had these big hats, these gorgeous velveteen gowns that were beautiful. Well, these dancers were that big. So all of us who would do it would always say in October, "It's diet time, because we're getting ready for *Nutcracker*." She had sets and scenery unparalleled, and she had her own orchestra, the Nevada Festival Ballet Orchestra. Now

Alex uses the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra. Alex is really doing a nice job. A beautiful job with his production of *Nutcracker*.

It's getting there. The difference is extravaganza. Maggie's was much more extravagant because of the *Hello Hollywood* sets and the costumes. Alex's really looks good though, and, of course, having the live music and the new conductor, Laura Jackson... she's conducting his *Nutcracker*. In fact, she's conducting all of his stuff. So he's on his way.

Besides the performances that Nevada Opera puts on, is there any outreach that it does?

Oh, it does. It has a children's chorus that's quite involved, and I know they have the schools.... Damon Stevens, who teaches here now, does their school performances. I don't know how involved their school stuff is, but their outreach does include kids.

On the Nevada Opera's website it says that it's the oldest professional performing arts company in the area. I was wondering if there's a distinction between different organizations like Nevada Opera, Nevada Festival Ballet, and Reno Little Theater that makes them professional.

You get that status as a professional organization when you pay your performers. I'll bet you that's what it is—when you pay your chorus or your principals, or your players.... That's what Maggie did that made her different. She just never could pull up the money to do like fifteen-week contracts and stuff. She was professional, because according to the union, she was paying her performers. So I bet you that's what it is.

One last question about the opera to wrap it up. During your time with the opera, have there been any general changes?

With directors. When Ted Puffer left.... The two that were the most important to me out of the ones that I've worked with were Robin Stampler and now Michael Borowitz. Just the way they led and the type of works that they did.... People just don't behave in the arts. Robin left here under very bad circumstances, and I don't get it. It's just leaders, directors, artistic visions... I loved Robin Stampler. He and I were very good friends. I thought he was brilliant.

Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Philharmonic?

Well, it goes back to a long time ago when Ron Daniels was the maestro. That was a long time ago. He was the second conductor. Maggie had the opera and I was up here. He called me up, and I think it was about the youth performance. He said, "Barbara, we do a fifth-grade show and we bring all the fifth graders into Pioneer Center. I want to do a cowboy thing. Will you choreograph a little dance for us?"

I said, "Sure." That started a very long affiliation. I had the dancing donkeys and I had my dancers from UNR in cowgirl outfits. We did Copland's *Rodeo*. Then eventually that kind of morphed into the next thing. Ron asked me, "Would you do for Valentine's Day the *pas de deux* of *Romeo and Juliet*?"

"Sure."

Then it went into the next bigger one. Ron asked me, "Would you do *Carmina Burana*?"

I did two *Carmina Buranas*, I did *Romeo and Juliet*, and I did five-plus years of the youth show with them.

After Ron Daniels left, then the symphony went dry with dance. Until recently, they've been bringing some dance back with their Christmas show.

Were the youth performances were at Pioneer?

Yes, and it was once a year in the springtime. We sold the place out. Fourteen hundred seats. It would be packed, and we'd do two shows a day. We did it for five to six years. The students loved it. My dancers loved it. The Conservatory was not open, so this had to be prior to 1986. We used dancers from UNR.

You had started at UNR around 1979 and built the ballet classes and program here. There was a University Ballet Theatre. That was based through UNR?

What happened with that was interesting. Once I started doing that, I started bringing community.... This is about the same time that Maggie was choreographing for the opera. There was just dance and opera. There was no Nevada Festival Ballet. There was not even *Nutcrackers* at that point. What happened was I started taking dance off of campus and bringing it to community, so more people started coming to campus because for the first time there was really dance with the kind of stuff I was doing. I was even bringing some people in to do my stuff. When I got the Governor's Arts Award in Dance in the mid 1980's, it was for my work in ballet at the university and for how I for the first time, got community involved.

Do you remember productions that you produced at UNR?

Yes, I did a ballet called *The Limpid Brook*, and I danced it. It was a Shostakovich ballet that was brought over by a dancer who defected from Russia. America had never seen it. I was one of the dancers in it, and I learned it and I redid it. We performed excerpts from that ballet. I did just fun things. I did more vignette type of things, and I did Smetana's *Bartered*

Bride. I did a cupid thing for a Strauss waltz. It was not full length, because I have never to this day had any interest in doing a full length ballet. I just recently did a full-length ballet, and I must say I really like doing it. I like little dances that shine individual dancers, and so we do a whole evening of these little dances. It was very successful. I got funding from the state and private donations, but it was just not something I wanted to do anymore.

The dance program as it exists, outside of this ballet part that you had, do students do recitals here?

Yes, we do big ones. We do one in the fall. We always have. We do a very small informal one in the fall, and now it's gotten to be bigger. We do it in the Nightingale Concert Hall. We've always done one big one a year where our students have something really to look forward to, and that's in the spring.

What I started with that. A dancer from Martha Graham.... The Nevada Festival Ballet had brought Martha Graham's Dance Company to Reno, so there was this wonderful young dancer named Kevin. I said, "Kevin, would you ever be interested in coming to Reno and working with our students?" That started the artist-in-residence program. That would have been around 1986, as well. That opened up the door. We just started bringing all these dancers, and we've had amazing guest artists here and amazing dance companies here. They would come for about a week. They would perform with us and work with our students.

Have you been involved in other programs or productions outside of the dance department, at UNR?

Yes. In fact Katherine DeBoer in the Music Department called me when she came

here. I probably was just starting to work with Nevada Opera again, and she asked me, "Would you do *Amahl and the Night Visitors* for me?"

I said, "Sure," and I brought the dancers down. That started my affiliation with the Music Department, and I have been their choreographer since then. I've done *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. I've done *Merry Widow* for them. I've done *HMS Pinafore* for them. I've done *Der Fledermaus* for them. Now Damon Stevens is in charge, and I work very closely with him. I haven't done anything with theater. It's just not my thing. I know nothing else but ballet. If you asked me to set a jazz piece or a modern piece, I couldn't do it. It's not my thing.

Are there ways that you involve UNR in the community and vice versa?

Yes, because of a lot of our UNR students perform with A.V.A. A lot of our students perform in Reno Dance Company, which is another dance company, and Nevada Opera. I take the UNR students out to the Piccolo School and have them perform outreach for the severely disabled children.

Can you tell me a little bit more about what sort of outreach you do with the Piccolo?

We used to have a P.E. degree here. It was recreation, physical education, and dance when I started here. It was a very large degree program. Probably every P.E. teacher in this town has come through this program. There was a movement class that was required to get your state licensure, and so I taught that. So, I was teaching dance to football coaches, because they had to have this class.

One part of the state [curriculum dealt with] disabilities and working with children

and students who were disabled. So, where do you go to work with disabled students? Marvin Piccolo School. That was probably close to fifteen years ago that I went out there supervising students. They said, "She showed up fifteen years ago and never left." It became my school. Besides doing student residencies out there, I started going out there every single Friday for ten years. I taught dance, pushed wheelchairs, rode horses, or did whatever I wanted to do.

We always do two big shows out there a year including Christmas at Piccolo. I bring out the cheerleaders and the wolf, and we do dances. Then I always do a big one in the spring. I've had every major ballet company, like Ballet Hispanico—the biggies—who were such arrogant. They were terrible. I made them dance in their cafeteria. We had Martha Graham and the Lakota Sioux. We don't bring the big companies anymore. It's just us. As long as I'm around though, we'll always do shows out at Piccolo.

When Nevada Festival Ballet died and went under, we started bringing in companies to perform at UNR as the second act of our show. It goes back to our students need role models and our community needs to see good dance. So I started writing grants and raising money. I'd probably had the big guys here on campus, but they always did the second half of our show and then we did the first half. When they would come here, they would be required as part of their contract to go to Lawlor Event Center and to Piccolo.

Is there overlap between these groups and the artists-in-residence that you're bringing out?

Sometimes, but usually they're different. Sometimes we'll pluck an artist out of the group and say, "Will you come back next year?" We ask most of them. We had John

Lehrer here from Giordano. We had him for three years, but I met him when he came here to perform with Giordano.

In terms of having pools of performers, what role has the UNR Dance Department played in Reno?

Big. What's my legacy? Well, my legacy is I'm a ballet teacher. You can call me whatever you want to call me, but I train a hell of a dancer. The dancers that I train are your performers in Nevada Opera; they perform in A.V.A. Ballet Theatre, and you've seen them in Reno Philharmonic. They're good. They're as good as anything you're going to get in a regional ballet company, because I demand it. If they don't do it and if they're not with me three to four days a week studying ballet, then they go home. Don't do it. If you can't do it right, don't do it at all. I'm just hoping that sentiment stays, and that what they take away from me... what they'll say is, "She made me be the best I could be."

How many students are you typically working with at any given time here at UNR?

My classes are standing-room only. Wednesdays I have almost thirty students, in my advance ballet class with a room that holds twenty-five. I think my ballet classes in town... it's only because of time. I'm kind of the madame of dance. I really am out there teaching people to dance. So, my evening classes are standing-room only, and classes up here are standing-room only. I say because I had the best... I really did. I studied with the greatest teachers out there, and plus I work hard at it. So, I have a lot of students.

Do you get people who haven't had any dance experience?

We get a lot. We have a very large beginning dance program here, as well we should. We have a lot of students who say, "I've always wanted to try this." That's great. This is the only place in town where you can find a pure adult dance class. You go to a studio, and they can't afford to do that. They're going to throw in a twelve-year-old and a thirteen-year-old. A twenty-two-year-old who wants to take a ballet class doesn't want to dance with a thirteen-year-old. Come up to UNR, pay for non-credit, and you can dance up here. Our beginning programs are huge. I now at this point in my life don't want to do that. One of my students actually teaches beginning ballet for us. I like only the professional stuff. I like training dancers.

What's the academic part of the curriculum that corresponds with the actual physical dance part of it?

Dance history, early dance history, foundations of where ballet comes from, jazz... What I try to do is make sure they have the roots. I'm the root lady. Where did break dancing come from? We just got done watching *Africa*. I teach a course on writing about dance and critical thinking about the arts. We have a class how to produce a show and how to teach dance in the schools. We have a very large minor in dance, probably larger than it should be. It looks very similar to what most majors do, but it's just what I got away with. At least our students get away.... It would be very easy for them to fall in someplace for graduate school from what we've given them here in a minor.

Of course, with things changing, they come back and slap my hand and say, "You can't make a dance minor have this many classes. It's too many." I think eventually that's what's going to happen, but for right now...

Has the program been affected by all of the budget cuts?

Nothing so far. I'm the money lady. I raise a lot of money. If you knew how much money that I had sitting in my... until recently, when we became a Department of Theater and Dance. Now Rob Gander has tons of money. I'm very good at grant writing, I'm very good at saving my money, and I'm good at finding alternative ways of making money. I don't think with what's going on, anybody's safe though. We have a lot of students. For my fine arts and diversity course, I had a hundred students this morning. My dance history courses are packed to the gill.

What are some of the actual physical places in Reno that arts and culture have been located?

I remember doing shows in the Mason Theatre, which was a rinky-dink theater. It was on the second floor.... It's over by the new movie theater. A.V.A. Ballet did shows there. I remember during my outreach, we performed at Old Town Mall. I've never done a show in any of the casinos, but, god, we danced everywhere. We did stuff in Carson City. I would take my dancers and go and help out. There was a dance school that was struggling, so when she was doing her show, I brought half a show to her in Carson City.

Is there a reason that people would have to move around to a lot of different spaces?

It's money and which you can afford. The bottom line is Pioneer Theater is very expensive. That's why most dance schools do their recitals in the high school auditoriums. We, at the Conservatory, do it at Pioneer Theater because we believe that you can't get that experience anywhere else. If you knew how much it cost

to rent the Pioneer Theater for one day... we're not a nonprofit. Usually you perform where you can afford to, and the Pioneer's expensive.

As a facility, how does Pioneer affect the landscape of cultural events in Reno?

All the arts groups are always fighting. They want to get a new theater. "The Pioneer sucks. We want something that's this, that, and whatever..." They're expensive to build, and this is all we got. It's a great space, also.

Have you witnessed some of the renovations to Pioneer?

Yes. I've been there performing a long time. It's not changed that much. I can close my eyes and see it the first time I met Maggie Banks when I was pregnant with my daughter— who's now a veterinarian at thirty—for one of the first times and not seeing it look too much different as it did then.

Do you feel like the purpose of Pioneer has changed at all?

What's interesting is that Willis, Miriam's husband got a theater that was in the red, and either he did something or we would lose it. He made it into a business, instead of just a happy, free place that everybody could use. He had to turn it into business. What he did with the Broadway series was brilliant. It's probably what saved it. Plus he's a good businessman. He's not an easy man to work with, but he's a great businessman.

When you moved to Reno, what did you think of Reno and what did you expect to find here?

I was so devastated. I was so depressed. I was so upset. Here I was pregnant, and I was

leaving my family, my friends, to a place I had never even heard of. I got here and I went, "Oh, my god." I had never seen a desert. I mean, it was the landscape. A mountain? Oh, my god, I was in shock. So I had to recover from that and from just having a child. Once I had the baby I thought, "Okay, enough feeling sorry for yourself, because you're not going anywhere. This is home." That's when I ended up here. I was in my own little bubble when I first came here and didn't look outside, because I really was very upset. It was kicking and screaming, taking me away from everything I knew and loved.

Now I love it here. My children were all, for the most part, born here. I travel a lot. I'm doing a lot of work in Peru. This is home, but home will always be Pennsylvania. I get called to do humanitarian work, so my mentoring work now at this part of my life is in the rainforests of Peru.

When you got here in Reno to today, culturally has it changed?

Again, I've got to say that when I came here, I just didn't involve myself at all. I didn't know. There probably was arts here, but I was in this place of wallowing and self-pity because I was in Reno, that I had nothing to do. I didn't live outside my own little bubble with my husband and this new baby. It's only when I stepped away from that and came here to the university, that the world of the arts was starting to open up for me. We had a symphony and we had an opera company. I was just working very hard at trying to build a dance program.

I don't see anything new. Tell me something new that's come since then. We have the same opera company. We have the same Philharmonic, which is good. There is the Chamber Orchestra, which I've really not worked that much with. Several ballet companies have come and gone. I don't see

anything new. We've still got these solid organizations that are staying alive, especially the opera company. The statistics say one-fourth of all opera companies are shutting down, while ours is still able to do stuff.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the work that you do in Peru and how it came onto the horizon for you?

It's just about trying to be perfect or the best that you can be, which us ballet dancers have a tendency to do. One false move and you fall off your pointe shoes. One unstretched leg in a major ballet, people look at you like...you can't mess around with ballet. It's sheer perfection. When I really got involved with all the diversity courses that I teach, researching the history and started writing this for the university core curriculum, I found there was a lot of research out there that needed to be done. I did work in Haiti and I did some stuff in Newfoundland. I wanted to find out really what cultural dance was, because there was no textbook telling me what it was. I didn't buy it. There was so little written about dance and dance history that if I wanted to really find out the roots, I had to go myself. So I did all those blurbs and went around and studied.

For the last twelve years or so, I have been really involved in forest cultures, because they are still pure. They're pure. That's the bottom line. Pretty much, out of all the untouched, nonwestern cultures, the forest cultures...white people are crazy, they don't want anything to do with them. I wanted to do Papua New Guinea and had spent all my time researching and trying to get there. I can't get there. At least now I've come to in my life, I cannot get there. I've given it my best shot. I have tried.

Three years ago I decided, "Okay, I'm going to Peru. I'm going to go and stay with the Yagua Indians," who are the ones the Amazon was named after. There are still

tribes. So I did a scouting trip one time. I said, "I'm not sure." So I went to the Andes and studied there a little bit, and then I went to the rainforest and said, "Well, which fits better? Where do you feel you're being called?"

I said, "It's the rainforest." Then last year, I spent a month in two different parts of the rainforest, because it's different depending on what part of the tributary of the Amazon you go on— the Napo or the Tahuayo.

It was the Tahuayo that jumped at me. The Tahuayo is four hours outside the jungle city of Iquitos, and the only way you can get there is by plane. It is so far. It is so remote that I thought, "I need to be here." After doing that, I did all this writing. I met shamans. I was taught things that no one had...they'd never seen a person like me before. I'm going back in three weeks, and I'm taking students in June and probably will continue to write a book.

The money that I make from this book... It's going to be called *In Search of El Tunchi: A Case Study in Religion in Magic*. It is about a jungle god spirit that they're afraid to talk about because of Christianity. All the proceeds are going to go to Dolly Beaver and the Angels of the Amazon, which is a humanitarian organization. I'm taking UNR students in December, and they're going to go and build water treatment plants in this area.

How long are you going to be there when you go in 3 weeks?

Ten days. I'm going through spring break, because it's high-water season. When go in June, it's not going to look the same as it's going to look in March, because there's dry land. I'm going to be there when there isn't any dry land. It's just pouring rain. I keep saying I don't like the snakes and I don't like the bugs. They're going to be trifold. The place is going to be swarming with bugs, snakes, and all that stuff.

I'm going by myself and I think that's the only thing—I wish I had somebody going with me. My last trip I went with a gentleman who invented the nicotine patch, Dr. Charles Betlach, and all transdermals. He was there looking for a fungus...some jungle remedy for fungus. I just have a very bad feeling that he was given that remedy and that he is going to market it and make it synthetic. I feel responsible because I took him with me.

How did you meet him?

I met him the year before. He was there just poking around, and we became friends. Through the whole year we planned this trip. I think like so many people, they go down to the jungle and find all these wonderful remedies and they make it in a laboratory, and then the Indians get nothing. I think that's what he's going to do. It's very sad.

Is there anything else you feel is important to include in this?

My thing is that Nevada Festival Ballet, especially with the passing of Maggie, and *Hello Hollywood* and all the dancers... it's given to our community, because they're still here, they're still doing their things. In fact, the children of the *Hello Hollywood* dancers are my students now at UNR.

In terms of the presence of ballet in the Reno community, has that changed over the time that you've been here?

It's not my standard. I think Maggie was close. I think that A.V.A. Ballet Theater settles a little bit. They use dancers... a lot of the dancers they use, I use, but they also use dancers that I would never use. Alex and I have talked about this. He's one of my best

friends. I think he says, "well, this person has to work or this person has class, and I need another dancer." Well, don't do it then. Do with less than with more. That's what worries me. We're not going up. We're not going up.

Is there something that would have change to take ballet here to the next level?

We would need somebody like me to say, "You know what? If you don't take class six days a week and you're not willing to commit your life to this, then you can't do it." That's not the case now. Nobody's willing to stand. Maggie did. I do it. I do it all the time. I get in trouble all the time. My dancers get so mad at me all the time. I have a ballet dancer who's been with me and she dances in my ballet for three months. Here we are two weeks before show, she missed rehearsals, and I pulled her from the piece. I don't win popularity contests, but it's a standard of excellence. Either you've got it or you don't, I got it. As my students all say, I didn't dedicate my entire life to Dolly's School of Baton and other related theatrical arts. Until someone can stand up, get some umpha and say that, that's sad.

Outside of ballet, are there organizations in Reno that do whatever it is that they do at that higher standard of excellence?

Reno Philharmonic. That's where the Reno Philharmonic is just like the premier arts organization in this town, because they don't settle either. They get the best conductors. Their musicians are the best the world's got. The people who play in the Reno Philharmonic are the best. I think the Chamber Orchestra is the same thing, just a smaller version. Nevada Opera is actually pretty good on that as well, it's just with the dance...

ANNE MARIE McTAGGERT

Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the day after my parents graduated from college in pre-med. My father was able to get a residency in Seattle, because they didn't want to live in Milwaukee. My mother, being a woman in 1926, was not able to get a residency anyplace. They had to give her one at the school where she went for her pre-med, we stayed there for two years until she finished. We lived with her parents and that's where I got spoiled. Then we moved to Seattle, and that's where I was raised and grew up.

Once your mother finished her residency and you all moved to Seattle, was she able to work as a doctor?

Not originally. My father lucked out. He was a sort of apprentice doctor to an older established doctor and stayed with him for a few years until he retired. My father then bought his practice, so he was set up with a big

fat practice right off the bat. My mother was not able to do anything more than entrance examinations at the university and other things where they pulled in everybody they could get to handle a crisis situation.

When the war came along doctors were all in the service, including my father, so she ended up working at the Health Department as an epidemiologist. There were normally three doctors in the Health Department, because it wasn't a full-time position. It was full-time when she went there though because she was doing the work of three doctors.

She was able to get a position after the war. Well, she held my father's practice together while he was overseas. She became Superintendent of Medicine for the Seattle Public School District, which was an awesome job for a woman with children—she had five children at that time—because she worked school hours and was home in the summer and holidays. It was great. It was a very fine position. She was able to work on various boards, like the Florence Crittenton Home for Unwed Mothers and various other things,

doing a combination of medicine and social work.

We all learned how to play some kind of a musical instrument, so we had an orchestra practically. The seven of us, making music on Sunday afternoon.... It was great. Both my parents played violin.

Tell me a little bit about your brothers and sisters and the instruments that you all learned to play while you were growing up.

I started out on the piano. My sister, who is three years younger than I am, started on the piano but went on to violin. She liked that better. One brother played oboe, one brother played bassoon, and then my youngest sister played the piano and the organ. She actually went on to have a very fine career in the Bay Area. I don't think she plays anymore. Well, she plays. She's retired and lives near the south gate of Yosemite. She plays the organ at a church there, so she still does play some. She had a very good career, though.

So your parents encouraged you and your siblings to play music?

We grew up with it. We had symphony tickets. As soon as we were old enough to understand what the symphony was about, we had symphony tickets. We had opera tickets. We went to everything.

While you were living in Seattle and growing up, were there a lot of cultural events available to attend?

Not as much as today. Today it's an awesome place, especially on campus. I went to the University of Washington and my sister did too. There were several theaters and theater groups. There were various music

groups. There were opera workshops. There were just a ton of musical activities available if you wanted to get involved in it.

Can you tell me about the schools that you went to and what you studied?

I went to a Catholic grade school and high school in Seattle. I got started on the piano in the first grade when I was five years old. I guess my father took care of the nuns and the priests at church and didn't charge them, so they said, "Well, we'll give your daughter piano lessons and we won't charge you." If I could have stayed with the nuns, I might have had a fantastic career, because these women are dedicated. Unfortunately, in the second grade, my father had a patient with this humongous bill which she couldn't pay. They did things like this in those days, she had a daughter who thought she was a music teacher, and she wasn't all that bad. She didn't ruin me, but she didn't inspire me. So I went to Genevieve so she could work off her mother's bill, and I stayed with it.

Did you have other teachers beyond that that you worked with?

Oh, yes. I was primarily interested, by the time I hit my senior year in high school, in singing. I managed to get enough part-time jobs around so that I could afford voice lessons. I did study with Steven Ballough, who was a pupil of Bartók at the Cornish School in Seattle. Then when I retired, I started to pick it up again here in Reno. For a long time the piano had to sit on second base because I was singing, but still I always played because of my accompaniments and all the rest of it. I paid for my lessons at Cornish by accompanying voice students and accompanying instrumental students.

In the elementary school and the high schools that you went to, besides what the nuns were teaching you at that time, was there an orchestra you could play in? Was there theater? Was there a lot of that kind of the arts going on in school?

No. We're talking about the 1930's and the first few years of the 1940's. There were glee clubs and rhythm band and that kind of stuff, but nothing real. Seattle was a small town in those days. It was sprawled out over a huge area, but it was a small town.

What led you to going to University of Washington?

It was there. It was relatively.... Here's what it cost me to go for one year at the university. I started in the fall of 1943. Tuition was \$30 a quarter, so that tuition for the full year was \$90. Those days are gone. [laughs] Being a resident, it was very cheap to go there. The school was excellent. It was close to home. I was able to live at home, and it's a good school. I was very happy there. I studied history with a minor in German literature. I knew I was going to be singing German Lieder, so I needed to learn this for a language. I studied German and learned it.

In terms of the singing that you were doing, what was it that you were interested in?

I really wanted to be an opera singer, but I did not have a big enough voice for opera. I did perform in the opera workshop on campus, but as far as going on for an operatic career, that was out. I did have the right voice for German Lieder and French songs, so that's what I pretty much pursued.

Can you tell me a little bit about the musical career that you did have, how you stayed with that through the years, and where it took you?

After I graduated from college, I went on for an extra year in the German Department to really hone my German. I then had an opportunity to go to Germany. The army was recruiting... we were still technically in a state of war, but the final peace treaties hadn't been signed, so they were recruiting civilians to go overseas and work. So, I got a job working for the army. I signed up for two years and then extended for a third year. I lived in Heidelberg, which was a good place from which to travel to other places. I studied over there and went to all the music festivals and anything else I could get my hands on. It was marvelous. It was a really good foundation.

When I came home after being gone for three years, my friends were either all married with children or gone. I thought, "Well, I'm not ready for that yet," so I moved to San Francisco. I had met a girl in Germany who was going to move to San Francisco, so the two of us moved there and had an apartment together. She got married first. In San Francisco I found a very good voice teacher, and that's where I really did a lot of singing.

Were you performing with different groups?

I was performing mostly paid church jobs. I was a regular singer at one of the Jewish temples, one of the Protestant churches, and one of the Catholic churches. I was busy singing in all of those churches, plus I did concerts and shows. We did a lot of musical [performances at] women's clubs. They would always want entertainment, and they paid for it. That's what you did in those days.

Then I got involved with a Gilbert and Sullivan group, so I performed with them. Whatever else would come along, we'd go for it.

What kind of music would you be singing at the churches? I'm sure it was different for the different churches you were going to, but...

I sang at two temples. One was a Reformed, and I really didn't care for that. There was very modern music. When I sang at one of the Orthodox temples, which is what I loved, we were screened from the congregation. We sang all of this old Jewish music. I had to learn to sing in Hebrew, but that was all right. I had a good teacher and she helped me a lot. It was just gorgeous music. I really enjoyed the experience of the service. It's very long. It's based actually on what the original Catholic service was. The Catholic service is now down to about an hour. In those days at the Orthodox temple, we started at about nine and we finished around noon. You go through all of these prayers, and you don't do them just once. You sing them, and the rabbi has his sermons. It was fascinating. I really enjoyed it.

The Protestant churches do more modern music. In those days at the Catholic churches, we did a lot of Gregorian chant, which I love. It just depended on which church you sang at in terms of what kind of music you got.

You mentioned performing for the women's club. Can you describe a little bit more of what that was like?

I've belonged to a couple of them here, like the Twentieth Century Club. Our prime reason for existing is to have lunch together, but also to raise money and give it away. We give a scholarship to the university and we give to all these nonprofit organizations. Then Business and Professional Women, that is just another.... It's been a long time since I've been there. We do give awards to deserving people. We have a Woman of the Year that we give a substantial award to. It's a community-based

organization to further the status of women. We got shafted a couple of times, but we're doing very well now.

In the 1940's, were you a member of any of the women's clubs you were performing for?

I didn't belong to any of them.

How long did you live in San Francisco for?

Roughly eighteen years. I got married, and my husband was in construction. We moved back and forth between the Bay Area and El Dorado County, depending on where the work was.

Were you involved in music and singing the entire time you were in San Francisco?

Oh, yes. It never stopped.

Did you have any other jobs?

I had a day job. [laughter] You have to have a day job, because it doesn't pay that well, so I was a secretary for various organizations.

When did you come to Reno?

We came once in the 1960s. My husband was a very interesting man. He's no longer with us. He had a hobby—he handicapped horses. He was also Irish and had the gift of the gab, so he wrote very well. He would like to make his "investments". He called it money management or investing. He actually made quite a bit of money betting on the horses. He also wrote for a magazine called *American Turf Monthly*, which is not a gardening magazine. He said if we moved to Reno, he could get stats every day on all the tracks and he could write much better.

The first time we came, I looked around, and I said, "There is absolutely nothing here that I'm interested in." I wouldn't even get out of the car. He went into one of the sports books and made some investments, and we went on to Las Vegas. But I was a rather semi-sophisticated San Franciscan at that point in time, and I really didn't see anything in Reno that I wanted.

We did eventually move here in 1980. When he died, I thought, "I've had it. I'm going back to the Bay Area."

All my friends said, "Give it some time. Don't rush." I was glad I stayed.

When you came in 1980, had your impression of Reno changed at all?

Oh, yes.

What did you think of Reno then?

I liked it. I didn't know too much about what was going on, but it seemed like a nice place to live. It wasn't too big. It wasn't too crowded. People were polite. I enjoyed it. It was a lot cheaper. At that time I was working at Stanford, and Palo Alto was kind of expensive. Reno was really cheap compared to Palo Alto in those days. So I spent about a year coming up here looking for jobs, etc., finally found one, and moved up.

How long would you say that you lived here before you got involved in cultural events and organizations?

We got involved in Mensa right off the bat, because we had belonged to it the Bay Area. Public Radio at that time didn't have too much in the way of classical music, but they had some. We got tickets to the opera and the symphony and went to recitals. I really didn't

do too much performing, because I always had pretty heavy-duty jobs. We did have a social life, too, so I didn't do it. I just fooled around. I played and I sang but I just really wasn't doing anything seriously. I was just listening to it.

It wasn't until a friend of mine—well... she put an ad in the Mensa newsletter asking for an accompanist, so I answered it. She was a violist, and we worked together and did some interesting things. She got me into the Carson City Symphony, which was called the Carson City Chamber Orchestra in those days. I started playing with them regularly. I then went on to the Reno Pops Orchestra and wherever else there was something to do. I also got involved in a lot of theater and other things.

Can you tell me a little bit about the Carson City Chamber Orchestra: how big it was and where it performed?

That was the first group I officially worked with. It's a good-sized orchestra. They are about the size of the Reno Pops, and they're all volunteers. I'm sure David Bugli draws a salary. He is the conductor and he has been ever since I've been playing with them. He is an excellent musician, composer, and conductor. It was just fun but, I'm not playing with them now. It's just a fun group of people who play because they want to. We played with some nice music. We have interesting guest stars that come and play with us. I truly enjoyed it.

As I got older, I could no longer drive back and forth to Carson. I don't drive after dark, so it became a problem. I just decided, well, it's time to hang this one up.

The Carson City Chamber Orchestra had led to, you said, being involved in Reno Pops?

I had met Joyce Williams, who was the conductor at the time. I was working as her accompanist, and we did a lot of things in California and here. In fact, we did one interesting thing. One year we had a contract to teach in Downieville. They had not had a music teacher for twelve years. The parents finally got together and raised enough money to pay for...we did team-teaching. The parents were also able to pay for a dance and drama person. We went over there for a couple of days every month and worked with the kids, and that was wonderful. We would probably have gone on, but they were able to find somebody in the community that could give them more time than we were able to do. So, that person got the job, but it was fun.

Joyce got me into the orchestra, and I played with them until she decided she was going to move back to Virginia. It wasn't the same after she left.

Do you remember, early nineties, a general timeframe in terms of when you got involved in the Reno Pops Orchestra? And if you don't remember, that's all right.

I retired in 1990 or 1991, and that's when I really started getting involved in music.

What makes the Reno Pops Orchestra unique or different from other groups that are around?

Well, the others, like the Reno Chamber Orchestra and Reno Phil, have paid musicians. The Pops is a volunteer organization, and you find that a lot of the same people play both—the Carson Symphony and in the Pops. We just do it because we love to do it.

When you got involved in the Pops Orchestra, were you still singing at that point at all?

No, I'd quit when I hit my sixties. I really didn't like the way I sounded anymore. I didn't do the pop music that people do, and I just decided to quit. That's when I retired. I started studying with Ron Williams, who was Joyce's husband at the time, and just got my skills back together and then took off.

When you were playing with the Pops Orchestra, was it mainly piano?

Just piano, right.

Was there a particular reason besides your friendship with Joyce that you got involved in the Pops Orchestra?

Well, I knew a lot of the people that played in it because I'd been playing in the Carson group. It was basically because I enjoyed Joyce and enjoyed working with her, though.

Who were some of the other people that were involved in the Reno Pops Orchestra?

Let's see. Jack Beck, who was the concertmaster, was a very fine violinist. Unfortunately, he is no longer with us. David Birch, who plays bassoon, he is still with them. A lot of them have changed and moved on. Molly Baylis Rosenberg used to play cello, and she's moved to the Bay Area.

How many people would be involved? Is there a standard number for orchestras?

There are certain types of music that will just use strings, and then others use the full orchestra with horns and all of the rest of it. You can have a group as small as twenty, and you maybe have sixty. It would just depend.

One of the things that used to drive us crazy was David and Joyce would both

schedule their concerts for the same day. That always made a problem, but we somehow worked around it.

Was it problematic because they needed the same musicians, or was it just tiring to play?

It was just like all of the other stuff that goes on—finding the right kind of a slot where we could be. As it turned out in the end, the Pops used to be in the afternoons, and David's orchestra would be in the evening.

Would the kind of music help determine who was playing in a concert?

Well, the last Reno Chamber Orchestra performance I went to had the three soloists and the strings. When they started playing the other stuff, then the brass and everybody else came in.

Do you remember the facilities that you were using for rehearsal and for performances?

Some of them were pretty bad. Maytan's was wonderful. They have an upstairs room and they use it for concerts. We were able to rehearse there for the Pops Orchestra. Before that, we were rehearsing at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which is now owned by Our Lady of Snows. They bought the church. When it was an Adventist church, we had some Adventist members in the orchestra, so we were able to rehearse there. We did a lot of performances in the schools. We went around and did school concerts. Laxalt Auditorium was one of the places we played at. We did the annual "Messiah" sing-along at the Pioneer. In Carson, we rehearsed at the high school and then usually performed at the Community Center.

What was the annual Messiah sing-along?

They do the "Messiah." Everybody and his dog does the "Messiah" every year. Even though Baroque music is my favorite music, Handel is not my favorite composer. [laughs] Bach is. Everybody has to do the "Messiah" at Christmas, which is fun. People show up and sing along with the orchestra and soloists, and so we have the annual sing-along. They're always very well attended.

In terms of music that you've played, are there pieces or performance that you enjoy particularly with the Pops?

We did some nice things that would feature the piano. Most orchestras don't give too much to the piano, because it's basically a string and brass outfit, but there have been things. When I was with the Carson Symphony, David had some friends who would compose stuff for them. A couple of very good people composed things with very good piano parts, so that was really lovely. He was able to come up with things with better piano parts than the Pops Orchestra did.

In fact, he called me one day, and he had this piece from a sixteenth-century Italian composer. He said, "I've got something down here I think you really want to play." He knows that I love Baroque music. Actually, this is a little before Baroque, with a little bit of Medieval worked in with it. It was gorgeous.

My favorite piece of music in the whole world has to be Bach's "B-Minor Mass." I think it's the greatest thing that's ever been written, and Bach is my favorite composer.

In terms of the Pops Orchestra being a volunteer group, what's the quality of the performances and what talent level are you working at?

It's pretty good. It's pretty good. Most of the people that played when I was playing with Joyce were musicians who played in other places, who taught, and who were pretty good. The current conductor had previously been conductor of the Youth Symphony, so she is pulling in more people from the youth groups and concentrating more on younger people. That's where her emphasis is. That's fine, the others... we can still function. Even though we're old and falling apart, we manage to do our thing.

In terms of the type of people that would volunteer during the time that you were more involved, was it an older group of people or was it a mix?

It was a mix. We had one fellow who plays the French horn who was still in high school. He's very good. He's now at Juilliard studying. Then we have the older people too. It was just a mixed bag.

In terms of people's day jobs, did you draw people more from one...?

We had teachers. David Birch was a teacher. He's a chemistry teacher. I was working for the state and at what was called Washoe Medical Center at that time. I was working for the Consumer Advocate, and with Washoe was doing public relations and communications, and acting as the voice of the hospital to the outside world. When they would have a tragedy or any kind of a thing that was the least bit medically involved, we wanted one statement coming out of the hospital. We'd run it by the P.R. people and then run it by the attorneys to make sure we said the right words, and that's what would come out. That was fun. People that loved music and loved to play...we're surprised

how many of these people there are. I play at the Washoe Med (now called Renown) regularly. I've been doing this for years and years. I'd taken a break and when I came back, this gentleman was sitting there. He happened to be my ophthalmologist, and he's sitting there at the piano playing Chopin "G-Minor Ballade". He was doing it very well. I was quite impressed. It's all kinds of people. There were a couple of doctors that played in the orchestras. It's good relaxation.

How often would you rehearse?

Once a week, usually on Thursday nights. Then the day before a performance, of course, you have a big fat rehearsal.

How many performances a year would you have?

I'd say maybe five. For the Pops Orchestra, there were a little bit more because we'd get into the schools.

For the performances that you were doing, would you be working with the same piece of music throughout the year, or would you be doing different pieces?

Each concert was different.

When you performed in the schools, was there a certain grade that you were playing for, or was it for the entire school?

The entire school. We would go out in Sun Valley and then perform at a couple here, like Billingshurst. The ones that were a little bit more... Actually, we would go to the ones that had teachers that were playing in the orchestra. That was pretty much where we went.

Was the Reno Pops primarily just musicians and the volunteers?

They had a Board of Directors, which took care of the nitty-gritty part. Joyce answered to them, and she selected the music. I don't think she was paid.

How well attended were the performances?

Not as well as the professional orchestras. We didn't charge, number one, and there's sort of a stigma... if you don't charge, nobody writes reviews. Nobody says anything in the paper about it unless you charge.

For the expenses that Reno Pops might have had, do you have any sense of how that was paid for?

Well, we contributed to them. One of the checks that you write is to the various musical organizations that you support. That's what pays for the music. The big expense is the rights for the music. Sometimes they buy it and sometimes they rent it. It just depends.

Over the time that you were involved with Reno Pops, were there any general changes that you witnessed in the organization?

Things changed after Joyce left. I really didn't care for the lady who conducted it. It's just one of those personal things. She stressed hiring younger people, and I just got the feeling that she was treating all of us like we were children. Joyce didn't do that. She might get mad at you and say something to you if you really blew it, but she didn't treat you that way. Maybe this is just the way I'm reading it and this isn't the way it is. I wasn't happy, so I thought, "I don't have to do this. There are other things to do."

Before Joyce leaving, was there a sense of community amongst the volunteers and the musicians and all that?

Oh, yes. We were just a group of people. We liked each other and we had a good time, and we enjoyed making music. It was fun.

Can you tell me about the Reno Chamber Orchestra?

That's a professional organization, and it's probably the best organization in Reno as far as musical groups go. I have season tickets.

Are there performances that the Chamber Orchestra has put on that stand out in your mind?

Oh, yes. Last month, they did Bach's Fifth Brandenburg, which is my favorite Brandenburg of all six of them. Jim Winn played the harpsichord and he played it beautifully. The flute and the violin were also excellent. Last year one of our soloists was Edgar Meyer, who is the contrabass player, which is very unusual. He is awesome. When I came home, I was looking through some of my CDs and all the really good ones that feature a contrabass, it was Edgar Meyer playing. So, some of the soloists have been just tremendous.

Is it common for the Chamber Orchestra to have musicians that it draws from locally and then to bring in well-known people to play with them?

Most of the players with the Orchestra are under contracts. A friend of mine across the street is a cellist and she's on a contract. Another friend is also under contract. They all have contracts with the Orchestra to play for

the year. They bring in the soloists, and they use orchestral soloists too. It just depends.

For the Chamber Orchestra, do you have a sense of if that's something that they can live off of?

Well, Barbara from across the street also teaches. She has this whole mess of students. She plays in both orchestras and she's in a quartet, but she does have a day job, too.

Where does the Chamber Orchestra perform?

Nightingale [Concert Hall]. Nightingale Hall is lovely. It's a lot smaller than the Pioneer, but it's very nice. The Phil plays down at Pioneer. Parking's a problem, but outside of that... parking's a problem in Reno, let's face it.

How well attended are the Chamber Orchestra's performances?

Oh, they're packed. The last concert was sold out—totally sold out. I don't know what the program is for this Sunday, but I'm sure it will be packed.

How much does it cost to attend?

We did some squirrelly things this year. I got a friend of mine to buy season tickets. They made a special deal for people who are buying season tickets for the first time. So, she got the tickets and I paid her for my half. But, roughly, they are twenty dollars. We go to the matinees because neither one of us drive after dark.

How many performances does the Chamber put on?

Five concerts.

It sounds fairly affordable for people to attend the performances...

Right. I mean, look at how people squander money on cigarettes, alcohol, and rest of the other things. They could come up with \$20 for a ticket to a concert.

Do you have a sense of the type of audience that attends the Chamber Orchestra performances?

A lot of musicians, and a lot of people involved in theater. I know I always see David Bugli there. He's a conductor. It is just people in the community that know it's the best musical group in town. At least that's my opinion. I think the Sunday afternoon concerts are cheaper than the ones at night, but I don't drive at night.

In the years you've been attending concerts for the Chamber Orchestra, have you seen any changes?

Right now the conductor is very good. There have been a few conductors that I didn't care for. When they play only modern music, I don't go. I really want to hear a melody, and I realize this is very innovative and all that good kind of stuff, but it doesn't please me. I don't go if it's all modern.

What are some of the differences between what most people would consider classical music and more modern music?

Well, you start out with Medieval, then you go to Renaissance, then to Baroque, and then to Classical. Bach is Baroque. Mozart is classical. Then there is the Romantic period—Dubussy, Schumann, Brahms, and all those good people. After that you get into the more contemporary stuff. Some of it is very good

and some of it is nice, but then you hit people like Stockhausen. It's just noise, as far as I'm concerned. A lot of people like it. I don't. It is just totally different types of music.

When I go, I want to be pleased. I want to hear something that is pleasant, has a melody to it, and has an emotional content that I can get wrapped up in. Sometimes I just want to hear something soothing. Loud music is okay too. I love the _____. That is modern, but it is melody. So, the Chamber Orchestra does a mix.

Is that common?

They're all doing it. A lot of people like it, but us old folks, we don't really care for it. [laughs] I speak for myself.

Can you tell me about your involvement with the Vintage Players?

That is my favorite fun group. We're attached to Truckee Meadows Community College, so we pay tuition. It is very low for those of us over 65 years old. You have to be in your sixties to be in Vintage Player although we have had a couple of people.... We have one person right now who is a theater major at TMCC in the class, but she doesn't perform. She's learning backstage in theater craft among other things, but she doesn't perform.

We've tried different ways.... We've done whole scripts. We had one fellow with us once who had been a writer for *Golden Girls*. He brought one of the *Golden Girls* scripts, and we did one of the shows. I was Sophia. I loved it. It was marvelous. We've done skits from well-known plays. We found out what goes over best, and what the people like the best, are short skits, funny skits, jokes, musicals and songs. Sometimes we will use a straight song just exactly as it was written and sometimes

we'll write our own words. We put our shows together ourselves, with help from Carolyn Wray. We bring in the jokes, we work on the scripts, and we put the whole thing together.

The fall semester is spent in rehearsing, and we do a performance just before Christmas. Right now we're getting ready. We're on the road, and we performed last week. We didn't perform this week because of the snow. We take the show around to various nursing homes and senior assisted living places. They like the short things, because a lot of them just don't have very long attention spans. We found that short pieces worked better than doing the longer things. They were more fun for us, but it didn't go over as well.

You mentioned Carolyn. Who's that?

Carolyn Wray. She is an awesome person. She is the director and she pulls us all together. When somebody doesn't show up, she takes their part. She is very gifted. She has received a lot of awards. She's very good. The college is very lucky to have her.

Do you know how or when Vintage Players got started?

I would guess about fifteen years ago. I was one of the first people. There are about five of us that are still in the group that were the original people. Shelley Young was the one that started it, and she called it Theater in Continuum. She actually had more artistic aims for us than were realistic. We did some of these performances and we did them well, but some of the stuff that she wanted us to do was just.... Let's face it—we have trouble memorizing lines. I don't. I can do it easily, though everybody can't. If I memorize something and do it in a show for six weeks, though, ask me a month later and I can't tell

you one line. It's just easier for us.... We all like to sing, we all like to dance, and we've got some good singers this time. We just throw these fun things together that the older people seem to enjoy.

How did you become involved in Vintage Players?

Somebody talked me into it, but I can't tell you who it was. [laughs] I do the same thing to people too. I have a friend that I play with. We play duets and also things on the piano. I drag her to different places and say, "You should be in this." She does the same thing to me. That's what you do when you're doing these things.

I started out with Shelley. Then I was out, for a year or so with back problems. When I came back, she was no longer there and other people were. Then I got involved with Truckee Meadows Community College, and so then it went on from there.

Who are some of the people that have been involved in Vintage Players?

Paul Aberasturi. He's head of the Theater Department at the college, and he's very good. We have really good staff down at TMCC who move things around, do acoustic stuff, do the electronics, and everything else. They're pretty much the same people every time.

On average, how many performers are typically involved in it, and has that changed?

I would say there are roughly twenty-five regulars, and we don't always do every show. One fellow, who is very good and goes by the professional name of Tumbleweed Tex, is also a teacher. He's totally involved in school stuff right now. He's not doing anything with us on

the show because he just can't get away from the school stuff (which is good, because he's a good teacher).

Where do you guys rehearse?

Down on Keystone [in the strip mall by SaveMart]. There used to be a theater, and now it's the Redfield Performing Arts Center. That's where we do all our rehearsing and some performances. The space is kind of primitive, but it's okay. It's not exactly in the round. In San Francisco, I did a couple of things in the round, which are fun. It has three sides, so it's not totally in the round.

How often do you rehearse?

Once a week, and then the day before performances. I work with a lot of the singers, and help them. The singers all come over here and want to work. That's fine.

Are you doing full musicals, or just musical numbers?

Musical numbers.

How often do you perform?

We perform every week. When we have our on-the-road show, which is where we are right now, we perform someplace every week. Yesterday we were supposed to have gone to Daybreak, which is daycare for seniors down at the Community Center, and we're going to do a pick-them-up in April.

Are you performing primarily in Reno-Sparks?

We'll go to Virginia City. We have in the past, as well as Fernley. One of our members

lives in Fernley. It's wherever we can get something.

For your performance in December, is that at the Redfield Performing Arts Center?

Yes. We advertise it all over the place. We get flyers, take them around, and put them up all over. Of course, there's no charge for it, and people come. It's usually a good crowd. We then break for about a month. When school starts up in January, we do two rehearsals and then hit the road.

Is there also a break over the summer?

We follow the college schedule, yes.

What is the performance that you're touring now?

It's called *Happy Days Are Here Again*. As a matter of fact, that's what our opening song is and our closing song is. It's just a real upbeat thing. There are some of the older songs from years back—a lot of boogie-woogie-type stuff. It's just fun stuff and all strictly upbeat—jokes and really short skits.

What have been some of the other performances that you remember doing? Are they a conglomeration of skits, or do you pull from one place specifically?

We have a theme. One theme was a Western show, and all of the music was Western. We did one that was supposedly taking place in a mobile park in Florida with all of these old falling-apart people. That was pretty funny. We'll have some kind of a theme. One was early Nevada history, and in that one I was Dr. Eliza Cook. I also did other things. They're really nice to me. They

always give me a chance to have a solo piano part.

We did a really old-fashioned melodrama once. We've done, Gay Nineties, but that really wasn't.... It was that type of music. We'll pick a theme, and then we just run with it and work the songs in. If the song works, we'll use it just like it was written. If doesn't work, we'll write our own words.

In terms of the on-the-road shows that you do at different senior centers, generally how are you received?

Oh, they're wonderful. They're wonderful. We have no problems with the people.

What do you see as the value of Vintage Players?

It gives us an opportunity to have a good time. We like to perform. It's fun. We're bringing some joy to people. We're helping them have a nice day. It'll be around for a long time.

Is there anything about Vintage Players that I haven't asked you about that you would want to include?

Just if you know anybody who's in their sixties or older.... I'm probably one of the oldest ones in there. If they have any talent (you don't have to be horribly talented), they should come see us and audition to try to get in the class.

Can you tell me about Ageless Repertory Theatre?

This is another one that Shelley was involved in. The joy of Ageless Repertory Theatre for us is we don't have to memorize.

You read your script. We were called the Reading Theatre and we changed it to Repertory because we do have shows that we bring back. I have done the Katherine Hepburn part in *On Golden Pond*. I'm going to do it again for Artown this July. We do very good shows, but we don't have to memorize it.

Is Reading Theatre a model? Are there other Reading Theatres?

There are several of them. The gal that played Marianne on *Gilligan's Island* is involved in one and she tours with it. What works the best for us is we just sit up there, we wear black, and if it is a necessity to have a prop like a boa or something, then we'll bring that in. For *On Golden Pond*, they let me wear jeans and a plaid shirt. Len Overholser is the director of that now, and he is very good.

Do you know a little bit about when it started and how it got founded?

It happened after Vintage Players. I could be wrong on some of this, but I think we all started out as the same group and then they went into two different groups. [Shelley started Vintage Players and moved on and then started Ageless Repertory].

Is Shelley Young still involved?

I don't know what she's doing now. She's just moved on.

Do you remember when Shelley left and Len took over?

No, because I was out for a while. It's when I was having back problems. When I came back, Len was doing the directing and

casting. He also has the door open to any of us who want to be directors and do anything else besides just act. He's more than willing to let us do it. We have several people that are doing a really good job at that.

Have you ever directed a show?

I'm not interested.

Do you remember how you became involved in Ageless Repertory?

I was just there. I might have heard about it. Somebody might have told me about it. I just got involved in it. I've had friends that have been involved in both Vintage Players and Ageless Theater, like Patricia Mathews, who I think still teaches at the Community College. She's a very close friend of mine and she gets me into things. You just find out about these things. The grapevine works and you hear about things. If you want it, you go after it, and you have to pursue it. They're not going to come after you.

Where do you rehearse for Ageless Repertory Theater?

We have had different places. We were rehearsing at the library for a while. They have that little stage in the downtown library. We've rehearsed at the United Methodist Church at First and West. I think they're rehearsing at The Circle's Edge. It's a church way over there on California Street. There's a strip mall in there. Fitness Millennium and Truckee River Bar and Grill are there. There's a little church in there, and they rehearse in there and perform in there. We've rehearsed at Laxalt Auditorium, too. Whatever we can come up with that doesn't cost too much.

Where do you hold your performances?

We've performed at Laxalt Auditorium, at the Methodist Church, at the Sparks Library, and at The Circle's Edge.

How has the membership changed and grown over the years that you've been involved?

Well, I'm not doing as much now as I was earlier, because I'm not suited for as many parts as I used to be suited for. I'm almost eighty-five, so I'm suited for older women parts. Those are the shows that I do. There's just a rotating cast, and I couldn't tell you how many people are totally involved. It changes all the time.

There is Mary English. She's been involved in KUNR or Channel 5. She's done some directing. She's an outstanding actress. She's a very fine director, and does very good at casting. Sandra Orloff is very good. Len is awesome, and he acts as well as runs the thing. Ron Smith, who used to be on Channel 5, and his wife, Pat, are both members of the cast. There is just a whole mess of very interesting people.

You mentioned On Golden Pond. What are some of the other plays that you have performed?

The Long Christmas Dinner, which is a family saga which goes on forever.

Are they generally full-length plays?

Full-length is the right word. They'll be one, two, or three acts.

Do you shorten them up at all?

Sometimes we make cuts. For *Blithe Spirit*, we made some cuts and some changes because

sometimes the language is not going to be appropriate. We have to be more conscious of not offending people.

Who attends your performances, and how well attended are they?

They're not as well attended because they don't get as much publicity. We have a little problem. We're trying to get notices into the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, but they just don't seem to want to do it. When we get flyers, we take them. Now, the Vintage Players comes up with the flyers, so we do better there. Ageless Repertory doesn't usually come up with flyers.

Are there a lot of expenses for Ageless Repertory?

We have to pay for the scripts and we have to pay royalties. A lot of the stuff we do, they charge us for.

What sort of fundraising is happening?

The performances are free, but we always have a jar sitting that you can put money into, and they accept contributions. I don't know what their official fundraising is, but I know that they do come up with enough money to pay for the scripts.

Have there been any general changes or growth over the time that you've been involved with Ageless Rep?

It's become much more professional. It is very well run, and Len is doing a really good job. It's become much more professional. The actors seem to be a little bit better than they used to be. It's a good group. There is the list of what's coming in July through February. Len has a mailing list, and he sends things out

to the people on the mailing list letting them know what's coming up.

It looks like you're doing a lot of performances.

We've got different people and different casts, and so you can run several shows at once.

Are there other plays that become a part of your repertoire that you perform a lot from year to year?

We were doing a lot of short skits. They're doing more of the full-length plays now, but for a while we were doing short skits, and those were fun. Some were comedy, some were serious.

How often do you rehearse?

Once a week, or sometimes when we're working on something... you don't have to worry about blocking because you sit in your chair. You have entrances and exits. The last one that I did, which I really enjoyed, was *A Trip to Bountiful*. I did the Geraldine Page part in that one. That was wonderful. You go on and off the stage, but basically you just sit there and read. You don't have to worry about learning blocking. You don't have to worry about costumes. You don't have to worry about props. You don't have to memorize. So, you can do it with two rehearsals. You're given the script well enough in advance, and you practically have it memorized by the time you hit the stage. I'll sit down every evening and go through my lines and that sort of thing.

It's just a great group. I would like to see more stuff like this, especially for older people, because it's easier on us to do that. I've done several shows with Joseph Galata. He is very good, but after about two or three rehearsals,

you have to be off book. If you haven't got it memorized... after a warning you still haven't got it memorized, you're out. That's difficult for people who don't... I mean, I've been memorizing stuff since I was five years old. It's not a problem for me, but I don't retain it.

Working as a docent for the Nevada Historical Society can you tell me about that?

There are four sections in the museum. I was interested in the first section, which is Nevada before the white man came. We have some artifacts that we pass around, and we take the children through. I prefer to work with the children, but not teenagers. Adults or children. I have trouble with teenagers, probably because I was a teenager once and I know what's going through their heads.

You take the tour through the different sections. I did a lot on the Victorian section too. I've done the whole thing. In fact, I took our Mensa group through and did the whole thing. It's just very interesting to see what Nevada was like in the very beginning and how it's progressed.

In terms of familiarizing yourself with what the museum had on display, what sort of things did you have to do to prepare to be a docent?

It's about a three-month session. You go once a week. You attend lectures and you have to write a paper. I wrote one on the singer Emma Nevada. They usually put you with an older docent when you first start out. I did some outreach in schools, too, with two other docents.

It's interesting, you show people the mortar and pestle that the natives used to grind up the grain. We have one tooth from some kind of an animal and we let the kids look at that. There's one thing that makes some people

feel creepy. In the Victorian exhibit, there is a thing made out of hair. In those days the women had long hair. The combings would come out, and they would make things out of the hair. I throw mine in the garbage, but this was... [laughs]

I remember exactly what you're talking about. There was the comb and the little box they kept the hair in.

That's right. I had a dresser set. I've given it back to my sister to pass on. It's something that has to remain in the family because it was my grandmother's. I had it for a while. It's an ivory set with all these little items, and one of them is the hair receiver. It's a little box with a hole in the top, and you just put the hair into it.

Can you tell me a little bit about performances that you've done outside of the groups that we have discussed?

One that was really fun, and this was actually at the Historical Society, was we got old silent movies and we were able to get the actual script. One was for *The Covered Wagon*. I was able to get the actual musical score from a woman who works at the Library of Congress. She got it to me. Thanks to Senator Harry Reid's office—they got it for me.

The Iron Horse was another one. I got that from a university in the Midwest someplace. That one was supposed to go back, but I'm afraid it went through my Xerox machine before it went back. I do have it and I've used it. So, we would show the film while I was playing the music that went with the film.

I work with the score and with the movie, so I have the score to play along with the movie. We took *The Covered Wagon* all over the place, and people just loved it. I need to have

somebody to turn pages for me and somebody to do other things for me. It takes about three people to do it. We took that all around. We took it to California. We did it at the museum right outside of Truckee. The funny performance was we were over in Ely and did one performance over by Lehman's Caves, which is practically on the border between Nevada and Utah. It's actually where a lot of the film was filmed. This woman came up to me afterwards and says, "Remember that old guy with the long beard that was in this one scene?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "That's my grandfather." They had used a lot of the local people.

That sounds fun, but exhausting.

You had to make sure that you went to the restroom before you started. Once you started, you're there for two hours and you're not going to move. It was fun, though.

How did this performance come about?

I was a docent up there. I was at a meeting and Phil Earl (he is now retired), was up there and he had the script. He said to Peter Bandurraga, who was the director (and also a fine musician—he plays with the Carson Symphony at that time).... Phil said, "Gee, it would be so great if we had a docent that could play the piano and do a score for this."

And Phil says, "Well, you do have one." That was me.

So we got the score. I had trouble getting it from the Library of Congress. They were not really cooperative, so I went to Harry Reid. He got it for me.

Good use of your senator.

Oh, yes. He's a fine fellow.

Are there any other performances that stand out for you?

No. You just fall in and do things. When there's an opening, if you want it, you take it. You volunteer for it and you take it. Sometimes you don't want to do it, so you don't do it. I am cutting back now, because I'm trying to spend more time at the nursing home with my husband. I'm not doing as much as I was. I'll get back, and I'll take on more students again.

How did and when did you pick up the harpsichord?

I've always loved the harpsichord. Maybe eight years ago I had been talking about wanting to have a harpsichord. I was at a music workshop in New Mexico, and a friend of mine was there and said, "Well, I've got this friend. He's from Santa Rosa. He's got these three harpsichords and he wants to get rid of them. Would you be interested?"

I said yes. He had the guy e-mail me a picture of the one that I eventually bought and my husband and I went down and looked at it. I bought it and brought it home, and here it is. I'm playing it this Sunday. Some people are coming over and we're going to play some music.

Did you have to learn how to play it?

Not exactly. I've had lots of good coaching. I belong to San Francisco Early Music Society, and I go to their workshops. I go to Hidden Valley, which is right in the Carmel Valley, and I've had some good coaching. You play the piano like this, but you play the harpsichord with your fingers more curved. You have to keep your fingernails really short. With the piano, if you push the keys real hard, you get a lot of sound. With a harpsichord, if you push them real hard, you break it. There's no loud

and soft on a harpsichord. They are like organs. The organ came first and then the harpsichord. The organ stops and various stops that you can connect with the different pedals that you have... then there are the little stops across the top so you can make things louder and softer. That's the only way you can do it.

I would love to be able to take lessons. I would like to study with Jim Winn up at UNR, but there's a time problem, as far as I'm concerned. It's a time problem for him too. He's got to teach all these students out there, and he doesn't have all that much time to take other people on. He's got a very active career himself performing.

Is there often an opportunity to play the harpsichord?

This one is not portable. It is seven feet long. There's no way it's moving.

Are you aware of other people around town that have harpsichords?

Jim Winn has a lovely one in his studio, and I have a friend here who has a tiny one. He has made it from a kit. The sound isn't the greatest, but it's portable. I wish I did have one like that because I could use it.

Are there physical places that arts and culture have been focused around in Reno that you know of?

Well, we've got a movement... this was started by Jan Johnson at Washoe Med— the Healing Arts Program. I've played in that. There are other places that are starting to recognize the fact that music is very good for people. People have been helped and have actually been healed by music. Right now I'm on the lookout for a small keyboard. I have a keyboard in there, too, but that's eighty-eight keys. While it's portable,

it's not what I want. We had a smaller one at the hospital, and I would take it. We had children's choirs at that time. I'd take it with the kids, and we would start at the top of the hospital and just come down. We had it on a rolling table and then a wheelchair, and we would just perform all the way down. Unfortunately, somebody stole it. Now I'm looking for one so we can do that. I talked to Jan a couple of weeks ago and I want to get started on doing that again.

Over the thirty-some years that you've lived in Reno, are there general changes and/or growth in what's happening in Reno and what's available to people?

Oh, there is a lot more going on now than used to be going on. When I first moved here, there wasn't very much. Coming from San Francisco, where I was saturated with it, it was like coming out to the wasteland. It was here though and you could find it, and people are becoming more and more aware of it. A lot of people are just turning to music. At night, I'll turn the TV on to get the news, and I turn it off. I take my CDs in the other room and play music. I would rather do that than listen to swill on the tube. A lot of other people are doing the same thing. They're getting more involved in music, and music does help.

I notice in going around to the assisted living and nursing homes... this morning we played out at Lakeside, which is just a retirement home. These people are great. They are. They're totally with it. We were doing a show of show tunes from movies and Broadway. They, I would say, knew the words to 80 percent of the songs that we did, and they sang along with us. You're giving them a good day, and they don't get that many good days.

In terms of the growth of what's available in Reno, do you see anything that's driving that growth?

I think it's the need for it. Reno has a lot of people that are retired, and it's a good place to live if you're retired. When the older people come in, they don't all want to sit down at the Peppermill and gamble. Some of them do, but not all of them. They want other things to do to enrich their lives. We found that taking music to them helps and taking theater to them helps. I would like to see more. I think as we're getting more of these fancy places like Cascades, Bonaventure, and Classic Residence, you're going to see more groups and more things coming on. This is something that they want.

Now, this is the flyer from Cascades. There are music performances all through here. Those are the different activities that they take people on, but you can see there's musical performance all the way through.

What has been the importance for you of being involved in music, cultural events and organizations meant?

It's kept me sane. You have problems and you have to deal with them. I had lost one husband, and now I have another husband in the nursing home, and it's very difficult. If I didn't have my music or the theater group to go to, I don't know what I'd do. I'd go crazy. You just need this outlet, and to me, music's been my life since I can remember. It's always been there. I just hope that they don't cut funding and get away. There's a lot of feeling in the schools now... I've worked in some of those schools where a lot of the teachers feel that there might not be music next year. I personally think we could do just fine without football, but there are other places to cut besides music. I really think that's important. The kids love it.

MARILYN MELTON

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Marilyn Melton: I was born in Reno on December 17, 1933. My mother was born in Goldfield, Nevada in 1907. Her mother was born in Virginia City, so I'm a third-generation native Nevadan. I have children and grandchildren who are fourth- and fifth-generation Nevadans. I have lived in Reno all of my life. I am currently trying to write the story of my relatives and their history in this state.

I grew up on Sixth Street, next to Saint Mary's Hospital, from 1938 until 1955. The town was quite small. When I graduated from high school in 1951, the town was only 35,000 people. In the 1930s and 1940s there were about 20,000 people. Then Reno started to boom and grow after World War II. Reno, from the time it was born in the late 1800s, was important as the hub for the railroad access to Virginia City, Carson City, California, and to the East. The University of Nevada started here in 1900, and so, as the

town grew, music, theatre, lectures, and all cultural activities flourished as they had on the Comstock from its beginning.

My grandfather, my mother's father, was born in Gold Hill. He was a musician. He played the violin, the mandolin, and the banjo. So, when the university presented *The Messiah* in the 1920s, he was a member of the orchestra. I have the program. He played in bands in Virginia City and at all the dances in Piper Opera House.

The hunger for cultural experiences is innate and was fulfilled in the bleakest of mining camps, including Virginia City. My great-aunt, Margaret Howk, who was also born in Virginia City, lived across the street from us and had a Victrola. When I was little, it was a treat to go over to her house and listen to the Victrola. She was also active in the theater and had a lot of costumes in the house.

My first personal experience was when I was probably eight or ten. My girlfriend, Evangeline Miller, had a mother who was very theatrical and dramatic. She taught classes

at Reno Little Theater for children. I was thrilled to be involved with Evangeline and her mother as she produced plays for young audiences.

The Reno Little Theatre, The Community Concert Association, and the university brought in well-known musicians and concerts. I saw Paul Robeson at one of the movie theaters, which were also used for concerts.

I was always an aspiring artist from the time I was very small. When I was in Girl Scouts, our leader was Ruth Hilts. Her husband was away in World War II, and she was alone with a baby, so she became my mentor. She inspired me and still does. She is one of my good friends. She is now eighty-seven and is still a wonderful artist. Ruth and another neighbor, Mrs. Gill, a retired schoolteacher, instilled in me that one's identity as an artist is a gift that enhances every moment of life.

Reno was the most vital community in the state of Nevada until probably the 1960s. It had the only university, so it was the cultural center for the state. Reno also had a higher group of educated people. There were many lawyers. It was the hub of the state politically and economically, so the arts were very active.

The university didn't have an art department—just one woman who was teaching art. Then, in the late 1940s, Craig Sheppard was hired. He was the only instructor in the Art Department for a while, and later became the dean of the Art Department.

When I graduated from high school in 1951, Reno High was the only high school in the city. The new building on Booth Street was opened in September of 1951, but I didn't get to go to it because my class was the last class out of the old high school on Fifth and West Streets. We had an art teacher and an art department at Reno High.

There was, I think, a strong cadre of artists in the city even then. A group of women brought a well-known California artist to Reno—Mr. Latimer, who gave lessons and started the Latimer Art Club.

About that time, in the early 1950s, some people—women primarily—got together and started a portrait group, which still meets once a week to paint. I've been involved with this group for thirty years. For close to sixty years, they have met every Wednesday. The artists put in money each week to hire a model and pay the rent. When I started, the model sat for three consecutive Wednesdays, but now they just sit for only one meeting. Over the years, most of Reno's most fine artists have participated—Gus Bundy, Pat Berastrom, Betty Mills and Marge Means, who took care of the money and other arrangements. We met at the McKinley Park School for a long time.

Craig Sheppard was such an outstanding artist. He was a watercolorist, primarily. Many people took classes from him and owned his paintings. They especially loved his Western pieces because he was a former cowboy from Oklahoma and knew the genre personally. His wife, Yolanda, and he met at the University of Oklahoma, where her father was head of the Art Department. She was a sculptor. So they lived out their days here in Reno. His best friends were Bob Laxalt, the writer; Gus Bundy, the artist and photographer; Walter V.T. Clark; Bob Gorrell, and Robert Cap.

Another outstanding artist was Hans Meyer-Kassel. He was from Germany. His name was Hans Meyer and it was a sign of his outstanding work that they gave him the name of the town, Kassel, as well. He was Jewish, so when Hitler was coming into power in the late 1930s, he left Germany. He went to England and then came to New York

where he was very distressed and unhappy. He ended up here in Reno, gave classes, did a lot of wonderful work, and ended his life in Genoa.

Some of the cultural institutions that are still going strong in Reno came into being in the 1930s. This was probably, in some ways, the pinnacle of Reno's growth as a home for the arts. The Nevada Museum of Art, which has had a couple of different names, is celebrating its eightieth anniversary this year; it was started in 1931.

The Reno Little Theater also started in the mid 1930s—probably about 1935—and was very popular. Everybody in Reno had to have season tickets. Blythe Bulmer, Ed Semenza, and Randall Ross were among the talented and dedicated people who started the theatre and kept it going. Their building was torn down about ten years ago to make way for the Circus-Circus garage, and it has struggled ever since to stay alive.

It is challenging for these institutions to sustain their importance in the community because gambling and the casino industry have taken over the downtown area. The casino industry brought in many wonderful entertainers over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. The shows and the showrooms were wonderful and they turned over every other week. One person who was particularly outstanding for cultural activity, believe it or not, was Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith. He owned and started Harolds Club, and he brought in some of the greatest talents. One of them was Isaac Stern. He underwrote several high-end concerts we attended in the 1960s. A couple of those concerts were held at Bishop Manogue High School, which was then situated on Valley Road near the university, because there was no Pioneer Theater at that time.

The cultural center of Reno was the State Building, where the Pioneer Center now stands. A lot of concerts and events were held there because they did have an auditorium. That was where the Nevada State Library was. It is also where the Nevada Historical Society was at that time up until the late 1970s.

The evolution from small-town, tight-knit groups has happened over time. There are still working artists, but, with growth, the community has lost the camaraderie and focus it once had. Art galleries have closed. The Artist's Co-op on Mill Street, which was started by a group of artists in the 1950s, has been kept open by the artists themselves sharing responsibilities. They have a rather poor location, but they have a building they can afford to keep.

The Nevada Museum of Art has always had a variety of classes. I went to a life drawing class when the first art gallery was on Ralston Street in the 1950s. It was in the home of J.E. Church, who was a prominent lecturer/teacher at the university and was devoted to the arts. He discovered the way to measure snow pack to ascertain how much water content was available for the coming year. He was an extremely brilliant man, and he gave his house to be the very first art gallery. The Museum of Art has had two or three different homes since.

I'm probably editorializing here a bit, but if you look at the pictures of Reno in 1927, Reno was more of a cultural, educational, and political hub, and it was beautiful. As Las Vegas began growing and growing, it took much of the state's economy south in the 1960s. Reno, whether it was politics or just happenstance, swerved into the direction of trying to be a little Las Vegas. It allowed gaming downtown and chased the businesses out of downtown. We lost more than we

gained, in my opinion, and it changed the complexion of this town.

A viable and dedicated art community still exists here, but now it revolves more around the university. The university is under attack financially. The fact is we don't seem to be able to balance the services we need with the money we have. Most of all, the cultural community needs a strong educational component and committed leadership to recoup what we've lost and to gain the capability to move forward.

We need the arts. When we travel, we go to art galleries—commercial and public art galleries. We also go to concerts. Ted Puffer brought the Nevada Opera to Reno. He built the Opera, teaching students at the university, and now it is struggling to stay alive. We lost Puffer, and funding is very difficult for all of the arts.

There were three friends who got together in the early 1960s and started The Sierra Arts Foundation. It was to be an umbrella organization for all the arts groups and was supposed to exist mainly for fundraising. The three friends were Carol Mousel, Barbara Feltner, and Barbara Wright, and they worked diligently. They gathered a dedicated group of women and men as well as gathered money to make this a reality. But each of the organizations they were trying to bring into the fold, like the Reno Little Theater, had their own donors and they didn't want to share.

Sierra Arts Foundation is still a community arts organization, but with a totally different mission than was originally intended. I was on the Sierra Arts Foundation Board at one time. I also have served on the board of the Nevada Museum of Art two or three times. I was on the Nevada Humanities board for twenty years, and I was honored to serve with Wilbur Shepperson, Judy Winzeler, and many other amazing people. It is a statewide board with

four members from Reno, five from Las Vegas, and then three from throughout the state. We sponsored humanities programs, speakers, discussions, and Chautauqua. Chautauqua has been very popular here in Reno and in Las Vegas.

I have also served on the Western Folklife Center (cowboy poetry) board in Elko as well as the UNR Foundation, the Friends of UNR library, and the Liberal Arts board at UNR. I was also part owner of an art gallery with some other women in the 1980s.

Besides the natural growth of Reno, were there other things going on that were lending themselves to the creation of these different cultural activities?

Newcomers to Reno who were artists, musicians, or interested in theatre found a home, you might say, and an audience. In its 120 years of existence, the university has been growing all the time and expanding its outreach. Many who attended the university and studied any of the arts, like theater, and stayed in Reno, became part of this network of culture.

Any of these organizations or groups must have a layer of people who participate in fundraising and serve as volunteers. When casinos were doing the showrooms, many musicians who played in the house bands came here and put down roots. About ten or fifteen years ago they did away with house bands and live music and replaced them with canned music. One of the persons who started out with house bands and stayed is Dickie Mills. He is still busy playing his trumpet around the city in lively jazz groups.

His wife, Betty Mills, is an artist. She taught art at the senior center for many years. Seniors who wanted to paint or learn met weekly for instruction. Betty Mills and

Luverne Lightfoot, another accomplished painter, taught many older people the joy and pleasure of creating art.

Can you tell me more about the changes you saw in cultural activities and organizations with the casinos coming in?

The personality and the complexion of the community changed in the 1960s. It wasn't subtle. We went from the little front porches and knowing your neighbors to commercialism, tourism, television, and political division. The traumatic events on the national scene and explosive growth gave us new citizens and a new city. The little grocery store on the corner was gone—replaced by the supermarket in the mall. Since the 1960s, the constant readjustment to technology has affected all layers of society, and we need the arts to steady us now more than ever.

When I was in school, there was one high school in Reno; now there are ten or twelve. By Vegas standards, that is still very few. Each of those high schools, hopefully, has an art department, but many don't. The Sierra Arts Foundation and other cultural groups have created programs to fill that need.

When I was on the board, Sierra Arts Foundation started an artists-in-residence program to take artists into the schools. It was mainly into grade schools because there was no public funding for the arts.

I'm not sure about the visual arts in the schools. I was in band in junior high and high school, and I cherish that learning experience. I have a granddaughter who is in junior high and is in the Honor Band. An outstanding instructor is brought in from outside of Reno who gives those who are chosen to participate music to learn before he arrives. The students then have a three-day intensive practice session before they perform a public

concert. Junior high and high school students from all over the city merge into a band with challenging music.

Students are constantly being exposed to arts and culture. As Reno has grown, some of the arts organizations have fallen away as others have become more viable. The symphony and the Reno Chamber Orchestra are going strong, while the Opera is still struggling.

The great financial crisis currently going on and the worldwide depression affect every facet of life. We must address the problem locally by revising the tax structure to finance the things that we need to finance—particularly education. Some just want no taxes, but taxes keep a government and a community working. We are in a financial crisis that affects the community in every respect, and culture is definitely one of those areas.

Being involved on a board or being a volunteer in a cultural organization is a good way for newcomers to become part of a community. It's a good way to meet other people; it is a good way to find out about what's going on in the community. Boards are tricky because so much of it is elitist, in a way. Organizations want people who have a lot of money or prestige, who can give money or get money, or get off the board. It is unfortunate because there are many with great ideas and intelligence who would just be happy to be involved.

Some organizations need docents and that is a great way to volunteer and be involved. There are an active docent groups at the Nevada Museum of Art and the Nevada Historical Society. Financial cuts have taken away many employees, but volunteers do fill some of those losses, even in schools and athletics. Everyone should try to be involved more than ever because devoted volunteers keep things going.

Can you tell me more about your realization of your interest and your talent in art and where that has taken you?

As I said, Ruth Hilts probably was the first artist I ever met. I was about twelve years old. She had painted the kitchen cabinets in the little apartment she lived in while her husband was in the service. There were blue and white Dutch girls dancing across a pale yellow background. I just thought, "Ooh, my mother didn't do that." Later, I painted clowns in the bathroom in my first home because Ruth had done it. I have painted walls in my grandchildren's bedrooms with scenes, and also an elevator shaft in my home.

I have enjoyed the good fortune to be involved with artists and all sorts of arts groups since I went to the University of Nevada and studied with Craig Sheppard. I have always considered artists to be my very best and most intelligent friends. My art collection is a representation of the artists I have known, and I love each and every one of them.

Craig Sheppard became a great friend. I was an art major at the university after I graduated from high school in 1951, and he was in the art department. Although I always say I was an art major, there was not a real major then. There was a little group—only nine of us—who were taking every art class and we were majoring in art. This painting over here is Sophie's, Craig's daughter. Sophie lives in northern Nevada. The one over the fireplace here is Hans Meyer-Kassel, and I have two more of them right here.

I have just plastered this whole inside of this house with art. When I really find a painting I love, I can always find another place to put a nail. It is almost like a disease when you collect things, but it is also a joy because so much of it is Nevada art and the artists are my friends. Every time, I say I'm not going to

buy another painting, and then I think, "Oh, my goodness, I really like that one." There are three pieces by Jeff Nicholson right behind you.

My mother, as I say, graduated from Tonopah High School in 1924. She said, "When we were in Tonopah, we all had to have a painting from Tansy." He worked in the bank in Tonopah. I have two of Tansy's pieces that were my mother's and my great-aunt's paintings. I have several paintings from the Artist's Co-op and others who painted with me at the portrait group, one being Gus Bundy. I not only have great paintings; I have great friends who are artists and a great history of the art of my lifetime.

Besides Tansy, there were other artists who came to this state in the 1860s to really put down roots; they brought with them their music, their instruments, and their talents, and they didn't stop stop drawing and painting. They have left a legacy of history through what they painted—the things that were visual—plus the fact that they devoted themselves to being part of this history of the state. I am very fortunate to have a few of them in my collection.

Do you remember when you started drawing?

When I talk to young people, I say, "Are you an artist?" Any child, if they're an artist, will know. When you are an artist, you know. I was always the one, when I was in grade school, of whom others would say, "Oh, Marilyn, you can draw. Draw me a horse."

I had a blackboard when I was a little girl, and I would say, "Daddy, draw me a horse." Well, I thought he was wonderful. I'm not sure he was, but his family had an art talent. When he was eighty and he was climbing up on top of the roof with his friend trying to fix something and my mother was wringing

her hands, I thought, "We've got to get him off the roof to do something else." I bought him paints, and said, "Daddy, here are some paints."

He said, "What am I going to do with this?"

I said, "You are going to give each one of us a painting for next Christmas." He lived to be eighty-nine, and my mother said I created a monster. He painted all the time. My brother, sister, and his grandchildren all have my dad's paintings. I have the first one he painted and the last one he painted.

Being an artist is a lucky thing to be. Painting brings such great pleasure, but frustration and challenges as well. It brings great friends, and people think you're special. It is special to be able to do something that other people can't do.

Is there a particular style or subject that you focused on in your own art?

I mostly do portraits, but I don't go to the portrait group so often anymore. When my husband got sick and we moved...time is always the thing that we always wish we had more of. Moving takes time and energy, so I dropped out when I was taking care of him and then I have never really gotten back. He died almost ten years ago. Once you get out of a habit, it is hard to go back. I went last Wednesday to the Portrait Society because they had a fellow sitting who I thought was interesting. I just did a pen-and-ink of him. So, I still get there once in a while.

Have there been any memorable pieces that you've done or a portrait that you've particularly enjoyed?

If I really worked at it, I probably could have done well commercially. I painted Moya

Lear. That painting has hung at the art gallery and it is now in the possession of the Lear Theater group. I did a big one of interior designer Wendell Norris and Allen Neuharth, former Gannett Chairman. I did a piece for Andrew Bremer, one of the Gannett board members. I also did Justice Proctor Hug, which hangs in the Federal Court House building. I illustrated two little books, one being *You Know You're a Nevadan If*. That kept me busy after Rollie [Rollan Melton] died. I enjoyed that project and it included many Nevada faces.

Like anything else, you have to take time, and you have to focus. When you are an artist, a painter, a writer, or a musician, you must withdraw from a life of interacting with other people. Creating is a solitary thing. I'm a person who enjoys being around other people, so there is this push-pull of studio versus play.

"Oh, my house is a mess. My dishes aren't done. I have laundry to do. The yard needs work." Can I say, "That can wait a while" and go into my studio? Those who produce have discipline. They leave everything else; they leave other people and other enjoyments that they may have and focus on what they want to produce. By golly, you know, it is all worth it in the long run, because who cares if your dishes are done? [laughs]

Has being an artist been lucrative for you?

No, and I can say that most people who are not artists think painting is a hobby and you shouldn't want money for having fun. When I do a portrait and somebody really likes it, they ask, "Are you going to give me that?" Like the chef who we did last week...this is just a funny thing. He would like people to give him the picture they had done, and that's okay. I think, though, I wouldn't go into his restaurant and say, "Give me free food." A lot

of people think, “Oh, well, you’re just doing something you enjoy.” Well, I’m sure that he enjoys cooking, too.

I have a darling friend, Jimmie Benedict, who I was with this morning. She is a marvelous artist. God, she is wonderful. She does textile art. She makes clothing, but it is art clothing. She was very offended this morning because a woman who has bought a lot of her things called her a month or so ago and ordered a special jacket she wanted made for this weekend. It was made specifically for this woman and she ordered it. She said the woman emailed her a message that said, “Have I bought enough things from you that I possibly won’t have to pay for this, or can I get it for a lower price?” She had already commissioned this work, and my friend was very hurt. Well, not exactly hurt, but thought it was a distressing thing. She was trying to figure out how to handle it. Artistic work has to have value both to the client and the creator of the work.

Now, when I do a portrait...I’ve got one in the back of my car. I had it framed because I put it in a couple of shows, but it’s a portrait. Well, who else wants it but the guy I painted it of? I’m going to give it to him, but on the other hand, I put a two-hundred-dollar frame on it. He doesn’t want to pay for it, though. I could take it out of the frame and give him just the picture, but I’m going to give it to him framed. People assume that you don’t want it, and I don’t want it, particularly. So he gets it for free.

Somebody was sitting here in my living room one day and he said, “My god, there are so many women in here.” [laughs] Harry Jackson did that piece, and my friend Sarah Sweetwater did this. Those are antique things. The one in the kitchen, you can probably see, is another woman. When I’m traveling, I always like going into art galleries.

I see things and I think, “Oh, I know where I could put that.” So here I am. All of a sudden I realized I was collecting sculptures of women.

Anyway, it is fun to collect, and it is fun to paint. I do enjoy it, and I feel fortunate that I can. I’m also fortunate that I don’t have to have the money that people would give me for painting because otherwise I would probably be starving to death. [laughs]

Have you received any awards or honors for your art?

My husband and I were generous financially to the arts. We received arts awards from the Nevada Arts Council quite a long time ago. I have a whole bunch of ribbons that I used to hang in my studio—a little cluster of them. I’ve never won any particularly great awards. I’ve never entered any national contests. I was in a gallery in California for a while and did sell a few things.

Most people don’t realize the money and time it takes to be a professional artist. Art materials and frames are expensive and delivering pieces to the art galleries takes time. You’re hauling stuff around all the time. It is a real chore. Successful artists really have to work hard. Women will say, “Well, if I had a wife, I could do this.” The business part of the art is also time-consuming. I have one wonderful friend, Terry Mimnaugh, who is an artist up in Montana, and her mother is her agent.

If you get into a really good gallery, they take 50 percent, and that includes the frame. Sometimes the gallery will frame it, but you pay for the frame. Pricing is always difficult. Say your frame is going to cost two hundred dollars to five hundred dollars. I always say that whatever the frame is worth, the art should be worth twice that. Say it is a two-hundred-dollar frame, so you charge four

hundred dollars for the painting; the total comes to six hundred dollars. Then you walk it into a gallery and they take 50 percent, so you're only going to walk out with three hundred dollars. You've put a lot of work and energy into it and hauled it back and forth. That is why some artists use such lousy frames.

Craig Sheppard was a handsome cowboy from Oklahoma. He knew horses and cowboys and he was also an exceptional watercolorist and teacher. He did experimental things. I've got one in the other room that I'm not sure how it was done. He went on a sabbatical to France with his family for a year. The pieces he came back with were experimental and didn't sell well. They were too different for folks in Reno at that time—too abstract. The cowboys he did sold like hot cakes. He and his wife, Yolanda, camped out on the Immigrant Trail across Nevada, and he painted a series and had prints made that were very popular here. He and Yo were both great artists and friends.

Most artists are regional. Few living artists are really well known internationally. George Carlson, Len Chmiel, and Scott Powers are pretty well known and are in my collection.

The Stremmel Gallery...Peter Stremmel's dad, Bill, was a hunter and loved paintings of African animals. He had a Volkswagen dealership in the 1960s, and Peter went to school in California. He came back after graduation and his dad gave him a little corner of the Volkswagen Building for his very first commercial art gallery in 1975. Peter has a great eye, and his wife, Turkey Stremmel, has a great personality. She was an art major here at the university and studied restorations in London. Together they've been an excellent pair—complementary to each other—and they have brought many major artists into

their gallery. Their gallery handles very few local artists.

I met George Carlson through the Stremmels. He is primarily a sculptor, but he started out as an illustrator and a pastel painter. He went to live with the Tahamara Indians and did a whole series in pastels and some sculpting. He is now seventy, and sculpting major works is physically demanding, so now he is focusing more on oil painting. Being an artist is demanding. It is mental and physical work at the same time. The horse right behind you is one of his. This piece over here is called *The Fiddler*. It is one from the Tahamara Indian series.

Can you tell me about studying art at UNR, and what the building and your classes were like?

After World War II, in 1947, the returning veterans from the war just decided to go to college on the G.I. Bill. The colleges were not prepared for this onslaught of students, and yet it was great. At the University of Nevada, they built a place called Victory Heights. They didn't build it; it was basically a bunch of wooden barracks. There were seven buildings used for married-student housing primarily because most of those who came back from the war were in their late twenties to early thirties. They were married with children and weren't going to live in dorms with the other students. These were phased out in the 1950s, because they were a temporary solution.

My husband and I were married in 1953, and we had our first child in 1954. Some of the veterans still lived in the married-student housing—Victory Heights. There was one prominent legislator who said, "We've got to get rid of those apartments. It just encourages the kids to get married too young." The buildings were phased out in 1955 even

though they were filled with married students and professors.

Quonset huts were other temporary buildings used during the war years. They were half-cylinder buildings of corrugated metal. They planted several of them on the campus as returning veterans needed classrooms and office space. The lower campus to the east was called “the hole.” There were four Quonset huts. Two of them were the English Department and two of them were the Art Department. So, that is our memorable Art Department.

Craig Sheppard was wonderful. He brought in traveling exhibits. Norman Rockwell was one of the shows hung there in the Quonset huts. Of our group of nine art majors whose careers I followed, all were successful.

I did the art for the 1954 yearbook, *The Artemesia*, and every page has my artwork on it. The person who did *The Artemesia* the year before I did, in 1953, was John Bruce Harris. I thoroughly admire and have nice memories of him. We had a good time. He became a brain surgeon. I haven’t seen him in all these years, but, in the *Nevada Magazine*, I saw he had been given him some kind of an award for his work as a doctor and pilot. He drew everything like the Terry and the Pirates comic strip. He was a very talented and brilliant young man.

Did you take a variety of classes on different artistic disciplines?

Yes. In fact, my whole thrust in those years was that to take as many art class as I could. My mother, like everybody’s mother, said, “Well, you can’t be an artist. You have to be a teacher or work in an office. You have to get office skills, because that is what women do. You’ll never make a living as an artist.”

I thought, “Well, what if I don’t want to just make a living? What if I want to do what I’m good at and enjoy?”

“You *have* to have something you can fall back on just in case.” They don’t say in case your husband leaves you or he dies. They just say, “In case you ever needed to, you have to have something.”

My mother was determined that I was going to be a teacher, and so I fooled her. I kept taking all the requirements that you take when you’re a freshman and a sophomore just to get the degree, but my plan was when I got to be a senior, all I would do is take art. And I did. I took beginning drawing and I took sculpture and watercolor from Craig.

Then, my husband starting courting me. I remember Craig told me that I wasn’t paying attention, and this guy kept hanging around the Art Department and distracting me. So Craig brought me a block of salt—a salt lick. Do you know what a salt lick is? That is what the cows lick. So I was to make a sculpture and I had to use the hammer and chisel, and I did. I made an Indian head out of it. I remember I was sitting out there pounding away on my salt lick while my future husband was visiting with me, and Craig was steaming because I wasn’t paying attention to what I should be doing.

Rollan and I did get married and had a child and lived at Victory Heights until he graduated in 1955, and we left for Ft. Benning, Georgia. I did not finish my senior year. I went back later in the 1970s and 1980s and took classes. It was not as important for a woman to go to school, or even encouraged in the 1940s and 1950s unless you wanted to be a teacher or work in an office.

Reno was small town—not particularly cosmopolitan, just on the edge of being cosmopolitan. Women were not encouraged to be athletic, but to just be pretty and get a husband. I guess I did that. [laughs]

What was campus like, in general, at that time?

The campus was small. You could walk from one class to another and know everybody. You would say, “Hi, hi, hi.” The people at school came from all over the state. The sororities and fraternities were important then. My mother encouraged me to be in a sorority because she wanted us to live at home but be involved. My sister and I lived at home while we went to college. Being in a sorority gave me the opportunity to meet other people and get a broad spectrum of friends. In that respect, it was good. Belonging gives one a home on campus even when the student body gets to be huge. It was distracting for me in a way because I loved people more than studying.

There would be competitions—say a float for the homecoming parade—and I would be heavily involved. For the Ski Carnival celebration, we decorated the houses. My friend Vanna Grant was a Theta. She was so talented and did these wonderful little characters—little people who were working for Santa. I worked very diligently next door at the Tri Delt House. I slept there and painted the dining room covered with butcher paper. It was ski heaven and ski hell and I was really competing against Vanna, not the Thetas. She was brilliant and I always admired her.

When the deadline was done and the judges came, I would run next door to see what Vanna had done. Vanna never really knew her father. She met him when she was forty or fifty years old. He was the guy who did “Snap, Crackle, and Pop” for Kellogg’s Rice Krispies. She got that gene. She was very talented. Her mother was a teacher and a violinist, and had come here for a divorce with her two daughters. Anyway, our little group of artists in the Quonset hut was so close and we were so competitive.

The competition between fraternity houses was quite important then. Getting “pinned” was getting engaged to be engaged. The fraternity boys would come over and serenade the sorority house on Monday meeting nights. It was a sweet, fun time on a small campus.

I did an oral history of my mother. I asked her a question and she would always say, “Well, we had such a good time, not like it is now.” She would talk about the 1920s and her time in Tonopah High School. I think there is truth to the small community where you have close associations. As the town grows, or the university grows, it becomes more impersonal. You may have a group of friends, but there are a whole lot of people out there who you don’t know or relate to. I presume we had twelve hundred students and it was small enough that we all related to one another.

How did you become involved in the Sierra Arts Foundation, and what was it like being a board member?

Well my friends—the two Barbaras and Carol—were actively seeking for their proposal and held a tea. Do we have teas anymore? They were small gatherings at some very nice homes. It was a social group that got people together and got them involved.

I met a lot of people through that organization, and they were not just artists; they were people who were culturally aware and wanted Reno to have strong arts organizations. That is what Carol, Barbara, and Barbara had in mind—making all these groups stronger by uniting them, but it didn’t quite work out the way they had hoped.

Sierra Arts Foundation attracted very good people and the old Boy Scout building on Court Street became their headquarters. For a while, the portrait group was in that

building downstairs. Rosemary McMillan, Sue Clark, and Fran Harvey were the dedicated volunteers who made it into a lasting organization.

Did Sierra Arts Foundation shift their focus at all?

It evolved and is mainly focused on visual art. The organization took over the Riverside Hotel and made it into apartments for struggling artists. I had a little issue with that, but evidently it has worked out very well. I know artists who perhaps don't have room in their home for a studio. I thought they should have set part of that building aside for people who lived elsewhere but needed studio space. I've seen that work in other communities, but I believe their funding source dictated it must be residential artists.

In Alexandria, Virginia, there is a building that provides studio, display, and classroom space for working artists who live elsewhere. The public can visit, wander around, look in their studios, and purchase. I believe this concept could work in Reno.

You mentioned you've been involved with the Nevada Museum of Art over the years. What are some of your early memories of the museum?

The Nevada Museum of Art exists on volunteers and fundraising. In their first little house on Ralston Street, we had parties to get people involved and fundraise. As the city grew, so did the museum. It moved to Court Street where really nice shows would bring in art from other museums as well as well known artists. They evolved into a bigger building with professional directors, and financially, into the spectacular present-day facility. The local dedicated volunteers and

donors have always been the foundation of their success.

There is now a great outreach program including a variety of trips, classes, lectures, and spectacular, well-staged shows. I have gone on some of the trips. We went to the Getty and the Huntington many years ago. Aficionados love the opportunity to see things they wouldn't otherwise see and they have all the arrangements made for them.

There are many classes for children and for adults as well as music programs and free days. The restaurant is wonderful, as is the shop, and that helps bring more of the community on a daily basis. It is still all about the challenge of volunteers and fundraising, though.

What was the Ralston location like?

The house is still there; it's a church now, I believe. Doctor J.E. Church, a professor, art lover, and innovator, gave it to the art gallery. It is on Ralston Street near St. Mary's Hospital. It was just a little ordinary house, but it became the incubator, focus, and home for the first institution of its kind in Nevada. The first volunteers enthusiastically went to work from that humble beginning to build what we enjoy today.

It has a bunch of bells now in the front.

Yes. I think the bells have something to do with the present incarnation of the building—a church.

What was the Court Street location like?

That area is old Reno—Court Street and California Avenue above the river on the cliff side. That is where the elite resided in the 1920s.

To get a divorce in New York State, proof of infidelity and one year's wait was required. When the six-week residency divorce law was enacted in Reno in the early 1930s, many wonderful, well-to-do people came to Nevada for "the cure," and many of them stayed.

Most of the houses along the cliff were built by the newly divorced who decided this was a great place to live. There are wonderful stories about these characters and their contribution to the community. They brought culture and a love of the arts to Reno. There was a house on Huffaker Lane that a lovely lady owned. She was very involved in the Reno Little Theater. The impact of the cultural community came with the divorce laws. Most married their doctor or their lawyer.

How did you become involved in the museum as a board member?

I would have to look at my own biography to tell you how long I served on these boards. It seemed to me that at some point, though, I had been on every board in town. I was probably on the Nevada Museum of Art board two or three times. The last time I went on, they started talking about fundraising and the people they were going to ask, I thought, "I think I've been here before. I think I'll get out of here."

I don't mind fundraising. I've done so much of it. I got more comfortable with fundraising with the Nevada Humanities Committee. Right now I'm doing a little fundraiser; I'm trying to get ten people to give me \$250. I have six of them so far. I need three or four more, and I'm trying to decide who I'm going to ask. This is for the Nevada Historical Society.

About twenty-five years ago, Marge Means got twenty artists to do a coloring book. The docents of the Nevada Historical

Society own the rights to the coloring book. It is all about Nevada history. On each page is an explanation of the history in that particular picture. It is a beautiful book. Most of those artists are no longer living, but it was very well done. Scenic Nevada, a group I'm now active in, got the rights to the coloring book and we're going to print a thousand copies. I'm getting the money together to print the copies; half of them will go to the Historical Society and half of them will go to Scenic Nevada.

I don't mind asking people for money. This one is fairly easy, except even \$250 is a lot for a small business right now. So I have to be careful who I ask. I asked Sundance Bookstore and they couldn't give me \$250. They would give me \$50, and I said, "I'll take it." I'll get \$200 more from somebody else. I can do that.

Can you tell me about Nevada Humanities and how you got involved?

Actually, President Lyndon B. Johnson, as part of the Great Society, passed laws that created the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. They are structured differently. The Endowment for the Arts requires each state to match federal funds, so they get more funding. The Endowment for the Humanities gives federal money to each state to produce humanities programs for the public. This was probably the most wonderful board I had the privilege to be associated with. It still is wonderful public legislation, the National Endowment for the Humanities and for the Arts. It is such a small amount of the government budget, but it is ongoing education for adults and for the smaller community that wouldn't maybe have access to higher education.

Board members serve a three-year term and can serve it twice, for a total of six years. A couple of people, like Wally Cuchine, have had a hiatus, and then gone back on for another six years. That is fairly rare, though. The governor appoints one board member to serve on the committee. Well, I was appointed by five governors, so I never took a hiatus at all. I served for twenty years, as did Wilbur Shepperson.

In Nevada, Wilbur Shepperson, Larry Hyde, and Robert Whittemore started the Nevada Humanities Committee. Wilbur was a governor's appointee and an outstanding history professor at the university. He had a slow, easy-going manner, but was brilliant, manipulative, and devoted to the committee. He made sure prominent persons from all over the state served on the humanities board.

We brought in many distinguished persons to be speakers and presenters. We were the first to fund the cowboy poetry event in Elko when it was just a bunch of guys standing around in the park reciting poetry to each other. The Humanities Committee has remained a funder of that for over twenty-five years.

The board was made up of half academics and half public representatives. There were sixteen seats on the board. It was always interesting because some of the academics didn't think that cowboy poetry was poetry. There was an argument annually about giving to this drivel that was really not poetry. I was always on the side of saying "Let's keep supporting this; it is Western culture."

The Humanities Committee has been great for the state of Nevada, though it is always hanging by a thread financially and politically. The fiscal commitment is miniscule, yet certain administrations just want to do away with the National Endowments for the Arts

and the Humanities. For the whole country, it costs, in a year, less than one bomber. Some don't value public education when it comes to budgets.

We have to decide if the cultural advantages of the arts and humanities and what they give us personally as individuals, to our community, and to our world is a value we will stand up for. If, as I was sitting here right now, all the paintings disappeared, or the music stopped, or pages of a book became blank, I would be devastated. That is what having eyes, ears, and a brain, and being human is all about.

As a Humanities Committee member, what were you responsible for?

I am the only one who has been chair of the Humanities Committee for three years in a row. They had to change the bylaws for me because I guess I wouldn't go away. A variety of challenges consistently faced the Humanities Committee—getting money, spending it well, and making sure that you're presenting programs in every little community in Nevada, not just Reno or Las Vegas. The geography of this state and the fact that we have all these small communities spread so far apart in the middle of the state made us different than other states and ran up our costs.

Las Vegas is difficult because it is so spread out and is not a cohesive community. Reno is much easier. Chautauqua and book festivals were more successful in Reno because they were easier to get to.

The portrait I painted of Wilbur Shepperson hangs in the Nevada Humanities office. The History Department wanted the portrait, but I gave it to the Humanities Committee because Wilbur was one of the three founders, and he stayed on the board

until his death. He made sure the committee was running well and had a good director.

What publications was Nevada Humanities involved with?

The two *You Know You're a Nevadan If* books were the brainchild of Guy Clifton. Guy works for the Reno Gazette-Journal. He is a staff writer and has done several books. He did a book on the history of the Reno Rodeo and one about Jack Dempsey in Nevada. Frank Mullen is another RGJ staff writer who did a book on the Truckee River and one on the Donner party. Rollan and I helped finance that as well.

For *You Know You're a Nevadan If*, Guy put the word out for ideas and then he put the material all together, and I did the illustrations. It sold very well. They've had two or three printings. The Humanities Committee underwrote the book.

The Prima Donna Girls were larger-than-life-size chorus girls on top of the Prima Donna Casino building on Virginia Street across from Harolds Club. I painted a picture of them for the cover of the first book. A couple of people on the Humanities Committee thought that was very inappropriate because the girls were scantily clad. I thought that was a dumb decision, as the Prima Donna girls reigned on Virginia Street for many years. The cover became Virginia Street in the old days, which is trite, as far as I'm concerned. That picture has been used and used for everything and was not the cover that I had planned.

Guy and I had a good time doing the book. We signed a lot of books, and people enjoyed them. They were about things that were popular a generation ago. It was about the way Reno used to be, but few people alive now remember those days.

Over the years that you were involved in Nevada Humanities, can you tell me about the staff and committee members?

I started with Nevada Humanities in the early 1980s. It had, at that time, twelve to fifteen members. I would say it was a wonderful experience, probably still is, for anybody to serve on the Nevada Humanities. You meet in Las Vegas, Reno, or some of the smaller counties, so it got board members involved looking at all of Nevada, not just their own area. Of those who served on the Humanities Committee, half were academics and half were non-academics from all other walks of life. They were highly intelligent people and committed to their own area as well as to the humanities.

Of the people from Las Vegas, there was a teacher. She had some handicap issues; I think it was arthritis. She had been a musician and she was a teacher in the schools. What a brilliant mind that woman had—just absolutely stunning. It was just exciting and stimulating to be around people like that in Nevada, and to know they are there and committed to the things that we want to expand in the way of knowledge to the general public.

I was chairman of Nevada Humanities for three years. They had always had one-year terms or two-year terms, but they changed the bylaws so that I could stay on for longer. I was back in Washington, D. C. with Judy Winzeler and Wilbur Shepperson at a national meeting one time during my tenure when Judy said, "I want you to meet this young man from North Dakota who is involved in Chautauqua." I had no idea how to spell Chautauqua, what it meant, or what she was talking about, but I do remember having lunch with Clay Jenkinson.

Judy was the mother of Chautauqua in Nevada. She was the one who really saw that

Clay had Chautauqua going in North Dakota with the head of the humanities committee there. She recognized that Clay was young and able to move to Nevada. She prevailed upon him to come to Nevada, which he did soon after that meeting. He came to Las Vegas and then drove, I believe by himself, up to the north. He got a good look at the way Nevada looks between Reno and Las Vegas.

Then he did programs for senior centers and for children. We went to the Nevada State Prison and were there with the most egregious of convicts who were incarcerated there for very bad things. I remember having to go through the metal doors. There was a gentleman who was teaching history, and he was the one who prevailed upon us to bring Clay into the prison and talk to the inmates as Thomas Jefferson. Clay is brilliant. He is able to play to any audience. He talked to the inmates about their personal responsibilities on a level they could understand.

Chautauqua came about from that time when Judy prevailed upon Clay to come out to Nevada. I think Chautauqua is probably the most popular and the best-attended event. It was presented mainly in Reno and Washoe County, but I think it was one of the best things that Nevada Humanities has done.

I really give all the credit to Judy Winzeler, to Clay Jenkinson, and to Clay's ability to not only be the touchstone for us to see who Thomas Jefferson was, but he also reads his audience so well, right away. When we were in the prison, he knew that so many of these people would never be able to get out. They asked some great questions of Thomas Jefferson, but his main message to them was education. That was the only thing that they could ever do to make themselves better, whether they were in prison or able to get out of prison. He emphasized the fact that their family had had so much influence on where

they had been and where they were now, but that perhaps they could overcome or take lessons from the family life that they had had, in order to make their lives better than they were at that moment.

We went from the prison over to Carson High School, and it happened to be Good Friday. The kids were getting out for Easter week, and they were certainly not excited about sitting in an assembly with all the other students in the school. They wanted to get out because it was going to be their Easter break. They could have been an unruly group, but Clay started out, as he always does as Thomas Jefferson, by saying, "I don't believe in God." Well, that got their attention right away. He just started discussing Easter, the Bible, and what the founding fathers had in mind when it came to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He talked about the fact that the word "God" is not in either of those documents, and that he believed in the separation of church and state. This was the kind of lecture to the students that got them interested in history and got them thinking. The audiences always are left thinking.

Just last week I attended Chautauqua every night, and my granddaughter was participating. We started it twenty years ago in 1992. I remember Clay was so excited putting up the tent, how we were all excited, and how more successful it became every year. Young Chautauqua got little children studying and doing research and able to get up in front of other people to explain what they had learned with their research about a certain historical figure. It is such a great program.

Of my two granddaughters, my eleven-year-old was in it this year, and she was Agatha Christie. Clay appeared this year and we had a packed house. The people love him. He again was Thomas Jefferson, but he did not do the history so much. He discussed the way our

government started, the way our government is today, and how the participation of the citizens is so important. He brings it home in such a way because he is such a wonderful presenter.

This year we had historians portraying César Chávez, Martin Luther King Jr., and Coco Chanel. Every one of them had the audience thinking, questioning, and learning about the history of who these people were. Even if they had lived through those eras, they became acquainted with these people in a way that most don't, even when they were living in that era. They tell you how someone like César Chávez arrived as a non-educated immigrant from Mexico, and yet saw the inequities that his people were facing. He led them to have respect for themselves and respect for the people they worked for, but also to demand the rights that they were due as human beings.

I'm not sure how much I contributed, but I got so much from being on the Humanities Committee and meeting people here like Proctor Hug and Phil Boardman. The quality of the people who were on the committee and served when I did from all over the state was tremendous, as was the fact that we could bring programming all over the state. I think we derived more from being on the committee than we gave.

Were there any other major developments or accomplishments that come to mind for Nevada Humanities?

One of the programs we developed that did not remain ongoing like Chautauqua has, and I'm sorry it didn't, was a book fair that was in Wingfield Park. We had authors with their books and a lot of programming around reading. Those were very successful, and I don't know why the book fair didn't last.

This is a result of the contention that we aren't going to have books anymore; we're all going to read on Kindles. It is harder to find time to read books. I do believe, though, that if people are going to learn things and then to write things, we should want to put them into something permanent. I believe a book is still the most important thing that we have. I don't know if they're going to survive. There are people who say they won't.

I also served for quite a long time on the Friends of the Library board at the university. I was the one who started the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame. The idea behind the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, which has lasted a long time and been very successful, was that we found that we have excellent writers in this state, not just of novels telling the story of our state, but also celebrating language. Recognizing what these authors have brought to us encourages more people to write. I hate to see that go away as well. I guess there are always challenges.

Some of the small communities in the county, the broad counties that are not Clark and Washoe, had little access to college or college courses. One of our most wonderful board members was Wally Cuchine. He was a young man who just decided he wanted to live in small communities. He went to Hawthorne, Lovelock, and Elko, then to Ely, and he ended up in Eureka. In these small towns he would do a lot of humanities programming. He would get in the library and excite these communities about the humanities. How many people would go and live in these communities for six months or a year and do this for very little money? At the time, some of the academics on the Humanities Committee would say, "Well, Wally doesn't have a lot of degrees. How can he actually bring humanities to these communities?" He didn't have a Ph.D.

Well, Wally did it because he has a brilliant mind. He is also, beyond being brilliant, enthusiastic and caring. He wanted to do this for these communities. You don't find people like that. We were so fortunate, and we just kept Wally employed, in a way, until he finally got full-time employment in Eureka. He has been a gem to what we call the cow counties.

I think the hard thing nowadays is money. The money that we get from the national government was never huge, but we made it work. The staff of the Humanities Committee has always been five people and no more than that. We tried to open an office in Las Vegas and have somebody down there. This is always a problem in Nevada because the two largest cities are so far apart geographically and culturally.

As Las Vegas grew, they wanted to have the office down there. It had been up here, and so there was a little push-pull there. When you deal with a smaller community, even Reno versus Las Vegas, you can connect with people a little bit more. You can get people out in Wingfield Park, say, for a Book Festival or you can get them to Rancho San Rafael to a Chautauqua. Las Vegas is so spread out and it has real challenges.

We've done Chautauqua and the Book Festival there, but it is a drop in a bigger ocean. You put that drop in a small puddle like Lovelock or Hawthorne, and by gosh, you reach, in some ways, more people in a smaller community than you do in the bigger community. In a larger city, it takes a lot of money, advertising, and buying a bigger building to put it in. I think in some ways we make a bigger impact in smaller places. We've probably had a bigger impact, naturally, here in Reno than in Las Vegas. That is not for lack of trying, though. It is not for lack of not having a great office staff and for making the most of the money we had.

There is, of course, that money from the national government. When I was chair, I was visiting with the governor and always trying to get some state money, just trying to get our foot in the door. The way the National Endowment for the Arts is written, the state has to match the money that they get from the national government. The way the National Endowment for the Humanities was written, there is no match money in that bill. We just had to struggle. We finally got our foot in the door and got a little bit of funding. The economy has gone south, though, so naturally anything we were getting from the state is not happening anymore.

We tried to also make our programs either free or very inexpensive, because you want to make them inclusive. You want as many people from as many walks of life to get involved and learn the things that we were teaching, but hopefully in a happy manner that they would enjoy. We have tried to do fundraising, but there are so many people trying to get the same dollars that we have not been very successful. So it is always uphill.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about Nevada Humanities that you feel is important to include?

I wish I could give you the names of everybody who served, starting with Wilbur Shepperson and before him. The people who started it were Robert Whittemore and Larry Hyde, I believe, and it has been going on now since the early 1970s, so that is forty years. There are a lot of dedicated people and I think we have done a pretty darn good job for a small state.

When I started with the Humanities Committee, they had a logo that was just like every other logo in the state of Nevada. It was the shape of the state of Nevada, blue and

silver, and it said “Nevada Humanities,” or “NHC.” Who knew what NHC meant? That was pretty white-bread.

We talked about it and looked at it. Nancy Peppin, the artist, was involved. Nancy had a great idea about the petroglyphs that were found out by Fallon. There was one in the shape of a hand. Well, that became our new symbol. We just had to do away with the blue and silver, even though they are our state colors. We went with the sagebrush—the green, the gold, and the Western colors.

We did a book, *The Halcyon*, every year for years, and we kept those colors on the cover. Each year was a pastel desert color, but they made a beautiful statement together on a bookshelf. The hand not only reaches back into Nevada history with the Indians, being a petroglyph, but the fact that it has fingers and goes to the arm creates a visual story of what the humanities are. They represent many things: history, justice, language, theater, philosophy, and all those genres that make up the liberal arts. They belong to one strong element of human culture. So I’m pleased that that happened when I was there as well.

Can you tell me more about the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame and the impetus behind getting that started?

I was on the Friends of the UNR Library board. It was a lot of women whose husbands had been instructors. It was just a sweet little group. Once a year they would get all the books that had been donated to the library and shove them out with a big book sale. That was it, though.

So Mrs. Garberson, who was chair president, left town. Somebody else was vice chairman and they couldn’t do it. I was third down, so they called me and said, “You’re the new chair.” [laughs]

I immediately went to work and we just shook it up. I made a huge board of directors, and had five vice presidents. I brought in a whole lot of younger people. Ann Morgan was one.

I wanted to broaden that group and make it stronger, so I did three things. I started the Book Nook. I had wanted to get a little building outside of the campus to make it a real little bookstore, but that never happened. We did start the Book Nook inside of the library, though, to keep an ongoing sale of books that were donated.

I got a retired professor, Fritz Reyser, and he really took it on as his project. He then got other professors, and that got to be the retired professors’ group that ran the Book Nook.

The other thing I started was an endowment. The idea was to make it a million-dollar endowment. We’re talking 1970s or 1980s when I did that. It has been gradually building, but I don’t think it has gotten to the million dollars, yet.

The other thing I said was, “Well, let’s start a Nevada Hall of Fame.” I remember I had about five people come over to my house, and we sat down and made criteria. We would reach back to writers who were deceased and had gone before us, as well as present day writers. We decided we would never have more than two or three every year. Proctor Hug was one of the people who was there at my house that day. I think Larry Struve was, as well. We made the criteria and we named the first three people who would be recipients, including Walter Van Tilburg Clark and Mark Twain.

We were still in the old library then—well, not the *old* old library, but we were in the middle of the campus in Getchell. Clarence Jones, who was connected with the newspaper, together with his wife, had invested in Speidel stock and Gannett stock, and had done very well. They were very

generous to the university. One day Clarence said, "I will fund a place in the library where we can have a wall and display these names and put out the books that were written by the Hall of Fame honorees where people can see the books." That is where it was for about ten years.

In the new Knowledge Center we have a beautiful place and a wall. I'm sure they will outgrow that wall and have to work around the corner to make it bigger. It is ongoing and has honored many outstanding Nevada authors.

Those who are now with the library group started a Pen Award for up-and-coming writers. I'm not sure I'm crazy about this, because some of the recipients of the Pen have already done some wonderful books. I think they have an age thing that they're dealing with, and I don't think writing is about age. They call them emerging writers, so they get a Pen Award. That is okay, but Sally Denton, for instance, was awarded the Pen Award when she had already published four or five books. She is writing a book almost every year and does a lot of research. I pushed for her to get the real Writers Hall of Fame Award. Just because she was younger didn't mean she should just get a Pen Award. She deserved to be on the wall, which she is now.

Another thing happened with the Book Nook about six months ago. Mr. Zink, who I'm very fond of, had been the head of the library for a number of years, and he built our wonderful new Knowledge Center. The reason they call it the Knowledge Center is that knowledge is not just in books anymore; it is in all our electronic gadgets, machines, iPads, and computers. He has moved on to being the head of technology for all the universities in the state.

I think that Mr. Zink thinks that the book is on the way to the cemetery, and he did

away with the Book Nook. Frankly, when he told me he was doing that, I said, "Well, the library is a living thing. It must do what serves its customers, the students, and the public in the best possible way." That building is an expansion of a computer. It is all wired.

I do believe there are people who still like books and who would still buy the books. Even if it isn't in the library somewhere and if they don't have room on the campus, I would still like to see those books sold and circulated back into the community for people who want to buy them.

Mr. Zink says anything that has been published in the whole world is in your computer, but I don't know if we're going to do away with writing with our hand. I'm not sure we're going to do away with books. Anyway, that's my editorial comment.

What are the criteria for the Writers Hall of Fame?

It was fairly simple. Anytime you're starting anything, be it Thomas Jefferson and the other framers writing the Constitution, you have to make it flexible so that the next generation and the next people who come along can deal with it. I'm not sure that they even use the original criteria anymore. Originally it had to be somebody who either wrote about Nevada or lived and wrote in Nevada. They didn't have to necessarily write about Nevada, but it had to have a Nevada connection. This was very important. Say somebody is born here, raised here, and educated here. There has to be a pretty strong Nevada connection to be called a Nevada writer.

With Sally Denton, for example, her parents still live in Boulder City. She was raised in Nevada, and she has written about Nevada politics, but she doesn't live here anymore. She writes on a lot of Western

subjects like Fremont and his wife, and Fremont was in Nevada. So there are a lot of connections.

Can you tell me about your involvement with Scenic Nevada and the national committee?

Scenic America was started by the Garden Clubs of America. Actually it was Lady Bird Johnson, and it was to keep our highways beautiful. In the 1930s and 1950s, this country decided, because of our commitment to the car, not to commit to railroads, unfortunately. We left railroads to do commerce and not to carry people so much. We committed to the automobile and it is a huge business—buying, selling and building cars, roads, and highways. Roads and highways used to be small. Now they are widening everything to four to eight lanes, and there are all these freeways. Lady Bird, in the late 1960s when Lyndon B. Johnson was in office, had that as her issue. Every first lady has an issue. She got the garden clubs together and promoted keeping our highways beautiful.

One of the problems with our world right now is that we have advertising blasting us everywhere we look. It is in our computers and on our televisions. One of the most invasive places is the highway with all the commercial signs. They get bigger and more invasive because of the technology and the ability to make things bigger and brighter. The idea is to catch the driver's attention. When you have digital billboards one after another, brightly blasting in your face, it becomes dangerous. It is also obliterating this countryside that we adore from sea to shining sea—our mountains and the visual beauty of this country. Yet you plant a sign in front of the Grand Canyon. It becomes ugly.

Advertising has gotten into wrapping buildings in big cities. They wrap them

with this plastic, so the building becomes a billboard. Not only that, now they are building buildings that have integrated the advertising right into the building. The building is a gigantic billboard, and it is built that way. The person who owns the building ends up making a lot of money from the advertising.

Scenic America knows that you obviously can't get rid of billboards, and advertising is a part of our life. The idea is to control it. People in Scenic America are really devoted, caring people who want to make this a beautiful country. It is a darn hard thing to do because the billboard industry and the advertising industry are so huge. Scenic America and Scenic Nevada are trying valiantly to make sense of what we have and what we need to have while just driving down the road at night. Can you deal with these things that are distracting and blasting in your eye? It also is distracting to people who live nearby. There should be rules and regulations. Well, it is not happening that easily. I'll tell you, though, when you bring up this subject up to people, people will say, "I hate those things." On the other hand, when you just have Scenic America and Scenic Nevada trying to control these things, it is not easy. It is no money against a lot of money.

My friend Doug Smith started Scenic Nevada here, and they have a chapter in Las Vegas. Las Vegas is undoubtedly the billboard capital of the world. The billboard industry argues that it is about First Amendment rights. People think, "I can put anything on a billboard and if you don't like it, you're ruining my First Amendment rights." This is a subject that is controversial. What can the individual do to keep their piece of the world peaceful and beautiful? I don't mind being on this group, but it is a pretty tough nut to crack.

What are some of the activities that Scenic Nevada has put on?

The one and only fundraiser here in Reno is the Quick Draw. They have thirty artists who donate their day and talent. They come, bring a frame, paint a painting, and then auction it off. This year it is at Bartley Ranch. The people who come to the party pay around fifty dollars. They get barbecue dinner and music, and then they bid on the paintings that the artists paint. The artists generously give their work of art to this cause. We've had a little art gallery downtown for the last three years as a way to pay the artists back for their time and for participating in the Quick Draw.

The gallery got to be a lot of work, so it closed this year. That was unfortunate. Doug and I traveled a lot, and, I'll tell you, Reno has no art galleries. It is really sad. There are a lot of good artists here, as well as writers and creators. They have no outlet because we have turned this community over to the gaming community and not to the cultural side of Reno. The cultural side of Reno struggles, I think. Even though the people who are here are caring, and want the culture, it is pretty hard when the local government is committed to just tourism and gambling.

Besides the casinos, are there other impediments to cultural activities blossoming in Reno that you've noticed?

Well, personally, I think it is about leadership. The arts were much more vibrant and active in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, but as tourism and gambling became the primary focus of this community, they overcame the arts. We used to have an arts column in the paper, and there is none anymore. There are

occasional stories, but local coverage of arts and culture is not ongoing like it should be.

I do think the local government and the people who run for office are funded by the casinos and the contractors. Their leadership is not focused on the people who live here and the activities that local people need or want.

You mentioned your involvement in the Portrait Society. What is the Portrait Society, and how did you become involved?

Well, it started in the 1950s. Marge Means will say that she was not the one who started it. I'm not sure who did, exactly, but Marge is now ninety, so she has been involved from its very beginnings in the 1950s.

It has always been a group who put in enough money to hire a model and paint every Wednesday morning someplace. I got involved in the 1980s, and I was really devoted. I never missed a Wednesday, because the artists became my good friends. I love being around artists. I admire people who can sit in front of an easel and make something come out of it. I just adore my artist friends, whether they are just my friends or people whose art I own.

So these people came together. Many of the people who I started with are no longer with us, but Gus Bundy and Marge Means and Pat Bergstrom. What kept this thing going was we always had volunteers to handle the logistics. They weren't paid. They did it because they loved it, and Marge was one. She collected the money, she got the model, and she had the place. They had to pay rent on the place. When I started, it was at the McKinley Park School. Every place we have been we have been restricted by the size of the place it could get and the rent. It was a classroom at McKinley Park. The city bought McKinley Park and they wanted to redo it, so they kicked

us out. We went to what was then the Sierra Arts Foundation building, which had been the Boy Scout building on Court Street. We were there for many years. Then most recently we have been at Nevada Fine Arts on Virginia Street.

The portrait group never has missed a beat in all those years. I don't think there is a Wednesday when artists aren't there. As people come and go, there are always new people who find out about it. They go and paint from live models, not professional models. Many are in costume.

Now there are, I believe, other groups that meet at the Nevada Museum of Art for a class. The Portrait Society is not a class; it is a group coming together for a common activity. The way we really learn anything is by doing it. Most people don't hire a model to come into their home or don't have a studio to paint people, so it is a great opportunity. I'm not sure if this happens in other communities, but it's certainly been a popular ongoing thing here.

Marge had it for twenty years, then another woman from Sparks had it for twenty years. Renate Neumann now manages the group and has been doing it for probably ten years. It is been going on for fifty years or more. It is a great way for artists to meet and get a little practice painting or drawing people.

How many people have been involved in the Portrait Society over the years?

I would say hundreds of people have been through the doors. When you go, you bring your own supplies. You can use oils or watercolors, or draw in pencil or pen—whatever you prefer. There are usually, on average, ten to fifteen people. The rooms are never big enough for many more than that. If you take ten to fifteen people over fifty years

or sixty years, you can imagine how many that totals. There are people who are very diligent about being there.

I remember Gus Bundy was there every week, and I have several of his drawings and paintings. Gus considered himself a photographer, but he really was a wonderful artist. He did pastels and oil paintings, but he wouldn't sell any of his paintings. He died twenty years ago, but his daughter has an attic full of all these drawings and paintings. He started when he was in art school in New York City. She doesn't know what to do with them. Probably, if I had wall space, I would buy all of them. [laughs]

I complain a lot about what we don't have, too—the gallery space or commitment to galleries that sell art, where she could put her dad's works and people could buy them. I don't know what is going to become of the legacy of Gus' work, but he was amazing.

In the old days there was a woman, Velda Morby, who wrote an art column in the paper. Velda is still living and way over 100, but she is not mentally with us anymore. Her little art column was well read and was part of the art community. It is definitely a loss not to be there anymore.

What has been the makeup of professional and amateur artists in the Portrait Society?

We don't have a lot of professional artists here in Reno, and I'm sure it is because there aren't art galleries. I will say that most of the people who attend the portrait group, take for instance Joan Shonnard, each takes their art very seriously and works at it. Any artist considers himself a student. I have a sign hanging on my wall over there that says "I am still learning." It is a quote by Michelangelo. You're always seeing something different, learning how to use your material, and

making art. Making art is a lifetime learning proposition.

There are men, I would say in the Portrait Society right now, who are professional artists. There is a predominance of women whose life is art as well.

Besides Gus Bundy, who are some other members of the Portrait Society who were also active in the general art community?

Jackie Springer, whose husband was a Supreme Court justice. Jackie and Charlie are both very active in the community in many ways. They buy art. Jackie is an artist and she works at it. She has also been involved in the Nevada Museum of Art.

Gus was a very close friend of Craig Sheppard. Craig, Gus, and Bob Laxalt were from an era before now. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, a very close group of accomplished artists clung together. I don't know that there is any group like that now.

I find arts groups, like boards I've been on, so often attract people who have a lot of money and want to get involved in something, but are not artists. They just enjoy being on symphony boards or art boards. They contribute a lot, but they're not artists. Artists are sometimes uncomfortable going to meetings and dealing with the nuts and bolts of running a museum or a symphony. It takes all kinds of people to make a community that is culturally viable.

I like tourism and I like the fact that we have a new baseball stadium. But if you start at North McCarran and drive on Virginia Street all the way to South McCarran, look for what is this community all about: who is here, who lives here, what we care about in this community. When you get past the university, which is looking beautiful and has a lot of new

buildings—the university has always been a very strong part of this community—you move right into downtown, with the neon lights and aging neon buildings, and that has gotten tacky.

I love that they've covered the railroad tracks. That works nicely. What is Reno, though? There is nothing. The art museum is off to the right as you drive south from the university. You don't really see it from Virginia Street. You see a sea of unrestricted signs, like a little forest, and huge billboards right downtown. These signs are so big, and it is all this distraction of signage, tattoo parlors, and liquor stores. There are a couple little oases. There is Stremmel Gallery and a couple of the nice, big resort hotels, like the Atlantis and the Peppermill. Who is Reno, though? Where is an art gallery?

I think the one downtown cultural center is not adequate for this community. The university has plans for building a huge new facility that would house the Ballet and the Opera. The economy is not helpful right now. Maybe that will become a reality someday. It would be something that would be used by the schools as well as all the cultural groups and the musicians.

It could be a beautiful, wonderful thing if we could ever focus on that. I think our government tends to focus on what is going to help bring people to the casinos. If we got the kind of leadership that we need, they would say, "Hey, let's let the casinos make it or break it for a while. Let's see if they can figure it out themselves. Let's try to figure out what this community needs to make it really ours." If it has to happen at the university, that is where you have to build this facility.

The other organization that I'm working with right now is the Nevada Historical Society. They have a huge amount of memorabilia and

artifacts. They have this little tiny building and no place to show all this stuff. The economy has also taken Special Collections out of the UNR budget and made it struggle in the library at the university. Those are the things that the humanities are about. It is about history. It's about everything cultural. Those are the things that a real community stands on and what makes it unique, different, strong, and mentally stimulating.

If we just could get people in government who focused, who had the right words to communicate this to the public, maybe we could shift the conversation to something different than seeing how many houses they can build on so many acres or how many people they can get pulling slot machines.

The other thing I hate—I'm sorry that I'm getting real editorial right now—is this trend toward wine walks, beer walks, and Santa Claus walks. They bring all these people downtown to drink themselves silly. Well, damn it, who wants to go downtown with a bunch of drunks?

They want to bring the Winter Olympics here. They had it here in 1960. They tried valiantly to get it here in the 1980s or 1990s, and it didn't work. They really worked hard at it. You know what? If they let this town get skuzzier and don't evaluate what the humanities, the arts, the museums, and the university can provide, they never will. It is a beautiful town in a beautiful setting, but we can't lose what we have by making it ugly.

Have there been any projects that you've seen that maybe went against the grain of what you've been talking about?

Well, I think life is about evolution. We're evolving all the time. In my lifetime, I have seen Reno evolve, and it was a beautiful little

community. Gambling, when I was growing up, was just a small part of downtown. It wasn't *the* downtown. Downtown was the banks and the shopping area.

Things change not only by people being activists, but also by not being activists and by neglect. If you neglect something, you're changing things as much as if you're actually building something. As we let the casino industry take over the downtown, we neglected it. And the casino industry then began to expand nationally; increasingly there is gambling everywhere. We don't own anything anymore. Gambling started in downtown Reno. Harolds Club and Harrah's were innovators. They built these wonderful places and brought in all these wonderful entertainers, and it was exciting in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the 1970s, so much of it went to Las Vegas. That was a source of competition, and Reno didn't get it. That is when they should have had the right leadership. They kept thinking, "Oh well, we're going to compete with Las Vegas." Instead of competing, though, they started getting all these bus tours from California. You could get on a bus for nothing and ride over. They gave people some nickels and sent them into the casinos. These people who had their Social Security checks or their unemployment checks would go in there and throw them on the tables. They didn't go after the high-end gamblers. They took the low-end gamblers into Reno, and that was a mistake. They could have gone the other direction and appealed to really high-end gamblers and made everything really high end. That would have put us in a better cultural position. They went for the low-end gambler, though, who can stay home and gamble now. They have Indian casinos over in California. They don't have to get on a bus and drive over here for

two or three hours. They have it right there. So we lost them. We're losing, and we went for the wrong people. I mean, you can look back and see the mistakes.

Then the casinos themselves didn't work as a unit and say, "Oh, let's make Reno this." They were so involved in getting people inside of *their* casino and keeping them there by blocking out the windows and not showing them where the doors are that they didn't care. I can remember the one person on the north side of the tracks, when there were still railroad tracks, saying, "I'm going to bring all the business up to my side of the tracks. I'm going to take all that business down south of the tracks. I'm going to kill them." He did, so the south side of the tracks became a ghost town.

They tore down the Mapes Hotel. It was the casinos that wanted it down. You have to save your architecture, too. They have never saved their architecture, even the houses. You go to some cities where they valued, and can see the difference. The Lake Mansion, for instance, had a nice situation on Virginia Street. It would be a great attraction right now. They wanted to build a bank on the corner, though, so they took that house and put it on wheels and took it down Virginia Street. They landed it as far out of downtown as they could get it, and there is a parking lot now where it was.

That poor house. Then they had to haul it back. It is a pretty house, but it was a lot prettier where it belonged in the first place. It could have become an attraction. It was built by the person who started Reno.

We don't treasure our history as much as we should and we don't treasure our natural attributes. They're finally doing something with the river, but it wasn't our local government that improved the river; I

think it was the lieutenant governor from Las Vegas. They had a tourism group and they put the money into doing the whitewater park down by Wingfield Park, which drew everybody back down to the river. It wasn't the Reno City Council. Reno City Council took a lot of bows for that, but they didn't do it. It was the lady from Las Vegas who made sure that some money came up to Reno.

You can't keep the past entirely, but you can pick and choose, and save a few things that are worth saving. People can make a difference, but government can really make the difference.

What changes have you seen more broadly in terms of cultural activities in Reno?

Reno has a very strong cultural community that goes back a long way. A series of people have been involved in the Nevada Museum of Art, the Symphony, and the Opera. There are a lot of towns much bigger than Reno that don't get the kinds of institutions we have had. It is because a lot of people have devoted a lot of time, energy, and money.

Ted Puffer was the father of the Opera here. To put on operas takes a lot of money, because of the costumes and scenery. It doesn't happen cheaply. He also nurtured voices at the university with his opera company. Dolora Zajick is now nationally known and in New York. She started out here. She came from Fallon. We need to cherish what these people have worked for and continue to support, focus, and nurture the groups we have and keep them going.

I'm now involved with a group that is trying to restructure the Nevada Historical Society and go to the legislature with a bill that will allow more public involvement with the Historical Society. It will allow the Historical

Society to accept more money and plan for a new building that would be downtown. If we could get the Historical Society downtown in a new facility, that would be a nice new thing. We can change downtown from being a wine walk and beer-drinking place.

We have the art museum. We need a better facility for the Nevada Opera. It takes money and it takes government involvement. People still want culture, and we lose a lot when we just focus on slot machines. Culture is good for tourism, too.

Our history is the history of the West and the history of this country. We have a strange state because there is next to no agriculture. We have a lot of dirt out there that is full of ore, and everybody comes from every place to dig it out and take it away. Nothing that gets dug out of our ground really has been able to make this a rich state, and that was all we really had. We don't have oil.

First, we invented the divorce. We invented legalized gambling. We invented all the good slot machines. We have invented a way to have people come and give us money and put money in the coffers, but we haven't learned how to spend it wisely, keep it here, and make it pay enough to make Nevada attractive to artists. It should be. It should be attractive to artists to come here. Artists like a place that is not overcrowded. There are a lot of artists in New York City in garrets, as we like to think, but real artists like to get away from a lot of hustle and bustle. Nevada is a good place, a comfortable place, and a free place in the sense of freedom to roam around a lot of expanse.

We need to treasure the differences and treasure the people. Some say, "Oh, well, you old-timers." People who are old-timers are here because they love this place and like the sagebrush. They like the fact that everything

isn't green, and newcomers have a lot in common with the old-timers. They like it here for the very same reasons. People don't move here because there is gambling.

When we talk about tourism as our number-one industry, we have to realize what is unique in this place. When you go to any place in the world, you look for that what is unique and different from where you live. What is unique in this state is that it's wide-open country. It is beautiful and painters love it. We have to cherish what we have, take care of what we have, and add to it in pluses, not in minuses. That is about it.

BETH MIRAMON

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Beth Miramon: I was born in Ohio. I grew up all over the United States. When I was born, my folks were living in Chicago, Illinois. My mother was a student working on her master's in education at the University of Chicago. My dad was living at the YMCA and was a student at the Art Institute.

Do you remember anything about the different schools you went to, growing up?

My folks were living in New York City on Washington Square. Mom had looked into the New York schools and just couldn't see her daughter in that situation, so she asked her dad and he gave her money so that she could afford a private school, which was just on the other side of Washington Square. It was a private school run by Miss Caboutier*, who taught only primary grades. Mom took me over there at first, but then I was allowed to walk across Washington Square by myself to

Miss Caboutier's school and back home again. We lived in a... I think it was the fifth floor of a coldwater flat on Washington Square, directly across the street from the Washington Arch.

We were living in McFarland, Maryland, and apparently Miss Caboutier's teaching had been good enough that I was accepted into second grade. What I remember about the second grade was that we had a spelling bee and I misspelled the word "six." I could not think of "x." I wanted to spell it s-i-c-k-s. Obviously Miss Caboutier had taught phonics.

My little sister was a baby and in a stroller at that time. Mom, the baby in the stroller, a neighbor boy, and I walked up to Dad's studio. We walked through the community and stopped to talk to a teacher in her yard, and went on into a woodsy area. The flowers were interesting to us children very much. Mom took the baby with her in the stroller, but the little boy and I were allowed to follow the path the last bit to Dad's studio. Before the little boy and I got there, though, Mom came back and tried to pretend that she was

not crying. We did not go to Dad's studio that day.

Mom, my little sister, and I went away to Grandfather's house in Lorain, Ohio. Grandfather was a wonderful man, and a strict Presbyterian. The community was that in which Mom had grown up and where she had learned violin.

Mom had a lady friend who had gone to school with her who was living in Lorain, Ohio at that time. They had been friends from childhood. This lady friend had two children and had come back to the community. I don't know if she was living with her parents, but she secluded herself in Lorain, Ohio.

One day we were at a park in Lorain. Mom and her friend were talking. I could hear part of the conversation, but I was playing with her children just a little ways away. It was difficult to bring up your children in this community, having left your husband. People were nice because they knew, but it was as if you were a lady wearing a scarlet letter, because you just did not divorce among Presbyterians. That apparently was what this friend had done. She had gone back to the community because that was where she could earn a living and bring up her children in her own way.

Then, we went on what is called a tramp cruiser. The only passengers were my mother, my little sister, me, and the captain's son and his nanny. We went through the Panama Canal to California to visit my grandmother. She was the wife of the grandfather who lived in Lorain, Ohio. She had had to go to California for her health and he supported her there, but he stayed in Lorain himself because he worked at the steel factory.

My grandmother had thirteen miscarriages. Her health was really bad, and that is why she had gone to California. She and Mom talked. There wasn't anything I know

that I heard, except that one time she did tell my mother, "Your father is a noble man."

My mother replied, "Yes, but that doesn't make him any easier to live with."

We went back. I don't remember whether we went back home by boat, or how we went back. I'm not sure where we went back to, but it was probably to Lorain. I do remember coming to Reno by train from the East. I remember arriving in Reno and getting off the train. Across the street was a schoolyard. It was the play yard of what I now know was North Side. It wasn't even called junior high because it was the only North Side school beyond elementary at that time.

We were met by a New York Life representative who took us to the El Cortez Hotel until we could find a place to stay. The place we rented to live while we got a divorce—and I say "we" got a divorce because all three of us had come to Reno for a divorce—was a group of stucco duplexes; they may have been fourplexes. There were plum trees all over a grassy garden around. There were four of these duplexes. It was at 240 West Liberty Street in Reno.

I don't know how much school I had missed, so I think what I started was third grade. I know that my mother went with me. Another of the divorcee ladies took care of my little sister while Mom and I walked to Mt. Rose School, and Mom talked to the principal there. I was accepted. I did not feel like a stranger. In fact, while they talked, they sent me out to the play yard and I was accepted by the youngsters and played.

I was not set back. I don't know whether they did special classes for me, but I was graduated. I had my summer birthday party when I was eight, and some of the Mt. Rose students came to that party at my house.

After we got our divorce, we moved to the top of Ralston Street. I went to Mary S. Doten

at the very end of the third grade year. I know now that the reason we moved up there was... for one thing, Mom could afford the rent. She had rented an upstairs apartment with wood and coal heat, wood and coal cooking, and a dumb waiter to carry the wood from the storage area downstairs up to the apartment. While I was at school, she had my sister stay with Addy Greta Hawkins*, and Mom went to the university to upgrade her teaching certificate so that she could teach in Nevada. She was no longer a violinist. She had been concertmaster of the Los Angeles Women's Symphony and she had played in the Chicago Women's Symphony. Those were the only two women's symphonies that existed, and there were no women in the symphony of either community at that time. That is what I remember about coming to Reno.

We stayed in the school system of Reno. I went to Mary S. Doten and I went to North Side. When I was at North Side, my sister started first grade at South Side. When I had finished eighth grade at North Side, Mom accepted a teaching position at a railroad town called Montello, Nevada. It is north and slightly east of Wells, Nevada. It is a railroad town with the Montello Consolidated School. My mother taught first, second, and third grades. I was in the largest class in that consolidated school, which was the freshman class of thirteen people. It was the beginning of high school. That is my early schooling in Reno.

Were music and the arts important in your home?

Absolutely. What I remember about arriving here was my mother, my sister, and her violin. Mom's violin was always with her. Her schoolchildren remember. Gordon Chisholm* wrote a story about growing up

in Reno. He was one of my mother's [school] children. *1940s Childhood as I Remember*, by Gordon Chisholm is the book. He remembers the violin.

When she was teaching in Ely, some of the teachers who weren't good at music would have Mom trade and teach music in their class for a period, and they would teach something in Mom's class. One year Mom had the children make cigar-box instruments. She wrote to the cigar-box company, and they got interested in the instruments and asked her to take pictures of the students. There were maybe eight of them that made cigar-box instruments, and they played them. One of them is now here in Reno and he is the choir director for Church of the Little Flower. I know that because somebody who sings with that choir is a neighbor. Anyhow, the cigar-box company had a professional photographer come take a picture of the group and they published it nationally. Another one of the cigar-box instrument makers was Max Oliphant, who is now a part of Oliphant-something lawyers [Fahrendorf, Vilorio, Oliphant & Oster L.L.P.] here in Reno. He is older than a baby boomer, so he's probably retired now.

Music was always important to my mother. When she was doing her studying at the university, the music professor was also new in town at that time. At least he hadn't been here long. He had three daughters. Two of them were the ages of my sister and I. Ted Post was starting his Community Symphony. He wanted Mom to be his concertmaster, and she said, "No. I will sit beside your concertmaster and help in whatever I can." She did play with them. The person whose profession is violin here in Reno is Leota Mastretti*, who was the music teacher at North Side. Leota Mastretti was the concertmaster of the first Reno Community Symphony, as they called it.

I've got papers here that record it and newspaper articles about it. I have photographs. Some of the musicians were not only playing at the clubs, but they also played with the Community Symphony because they wanted to. Musicians will play.

In 1969, one of the musicians who had been playing with the Community Symphony decided musicians should be paid, which they were not, so he brought Gregory Stone here. Of course, there were musicians available. It didn't take long for Gregory Stone to get something together. That was the Community Symphony. This is the newspaper article about the start of the Reno Philharmonic.

In fact, Vahe Khochayan, who was the founder and director of the Reno Chamber Orchestra for so long, was one of the musicians with the Philharmonic. There were some musicians who liked to do smaller groups and different kind of music. Now it is as big a group as... well, it is not quite as big a group [as the Reno Philharmonic]. I don't know how many musicians there are in the Philharmonic. There are forty in the Reno Chamber Orchestra.

For the Community Symphony that your mother was involved in, one musician from that group went on and helped start the Reno Philharmonic?

No, the other way around. He brought Gregory Stone from Los Angeles, and Gregory Stone said, "Anybody who's going to play in the Philharmonic will belong to the union." In fact, Steve Maytan had been in Reno, but he would not play with the Community Symphony because he was a union member and he believed in it. He was here and he did repairs of instruments, but he did not play with the Community Symphony. It was Fred Di Salvo from the Community Symphony who brought Gregory Stone.

The Community Symphony did not and could not pay the musicians. They did audition, I believe, and they came from all walks of life. In fact, I have photographs. Some of the musicians were from Stead Air Base. So, the only way the Community Symphony and the Philharmonic were related was that the same musicians became the Philharmonic.

Once the Philharmonic got going and was actually paying people, did a lot of musicians play with the Phil?

In fact, both. I think the Community Symphony continued to exist. The Reno Chamber Orchestra was yet a third organization that was started by Vahe Khochayan, who had been with the Philharmonic.

Do you remember where the Community Symphony performances were held?

All of the performing arts at that time did not have much of a place to perform. The Community Symphony played in the gymnasium at the university, and they hung heavy cloth backdrops from the upstairs. In other words, the acoustics were not the greatest. The Ansari Building is there now; it replaced the gymnasium. A new gymnasium was built on Virginia Street, and it is just south of the Church Fine Arts. It was called the New Gymnasium. It is old now. I mean, it *was* a new gymnasium.

They also played at 20th Century Club. I'm not sure how big of a group they were. Occasionally they would do music that had a choir, and it would usually be above. For instance, it was up where the audience was in the gymnasium. I have photographs of those, too.

Mrs. Dottie Post* sang. I don't remember whether L_____ were parts of the music

community or not. Altogether, there came to be three music groups. Before Deena Puffer and Ted Puffer [started the Opera], there was a university group. I believe they called themselves the University Singers, and they did light opera. They performed at the building that had become Reno Little Theater on the southeast corner of Sierra and Seventh Street. It is now the northwest corner of the Circus Circus parking garage.

Do you remember how well attended the performances were for the Community Symphony? How supportive was Reno of the Community Symphony?

Very supportive—that is why it existed. It was the same as the Reno Little Theater. The reason that existed was because it was so well received. There is a book—an oral history—about the Reno Little Theater and Ed Semenza. He chronicled how difficult it was to find a place to do performances. In fact, when they did some of their plays at the State Building, he had to stand there during the whole play, holding two electric cords because they had to go from here to there and there was no way to do it, except for somebody to actually stand there and hold them.

He also talked about Ruth Ryan. She had the same problem. There was no venue. The Reno Little Theater plays did not perform at school auditoriums, but Ruth Ryan's performances were at school auditoriums. Once a year she would have a recital, and from among those students at the recital a few were chosen. The Majestic Theater would, between matinees, pull the movie screen up into their upper area (which theaters have if they are a proper theater), and we danced on the Majestic Theater stage. Reno accepted the performing arts very much.

Can you tell me more about your experience taking classes at Ruth Ryan School?

My sister was a good deal younger and she was a good musician, but my mom asked me if I wanted violin lessons. At first I took some violin lessons from Leota Mastretti at North Side. She taught violin lessons. That was when I was younger. I was really not good at it, though. I wanted to dance.

At the Ruth Ryan School of Dance, Ruth's sister, Margaret, taught piano and Ruth taught all kinds of dance. She even taught black students. At that time, when Ruth had the black students, it was only those students. They were mostly tap, but they were also acrobatic. There is a photo album in the Nevada Historical Society's research room. It's much too big, but that's the way they made it, so there it is. It has photographs sent to Ruth in gratitude from these performing artists.

I really liked dancing, but again, it wasn't in my karma. [laughs] When I went to Montello there was no dancing school, and there wasn't one in Ely either. I have an article about Ruth Ryan. She was only in her sixties when she died. She had been a smoker.

I think three of the years that I took [lessons], two of the years we performed at the Majestic and the third year we performed at the Granada. That stage door was between the Granada Theater and the Elks Club. The stage door for the Majestic was on the Center Street side of the Majestic Theater, which is where the skating rink is now. We walked up some wrought iron stairs to the level of the stage and were allowed in at the stage door, which was quite different than any theater stage door. There were no dressing rooms. I wrote a story for OLLI about performing at the Majestic. There were no venues, though. The first of all the venues was the Reno Little Theater.

Where were the dance classes held?

Upstairs in what was called the Bitheon* Hall, which was in the middle of the block between Virginia and Sierra Streets on the north side of Fourth Street.

How often did you go to classes?

I think it was twice a week. Of course, she had different classes all day every day.

How would you describe the quality of the school and the instruction you received?

The instruction—according to not only my own feelings about it, but the thank-you notes that are in the scrapbook—was excellent. Those people who went to dance professionally were prepared to be in a professional situation as far as dancing is concerned. As far as the venue is concerned, they were not.

Were there a lot of cultural activities available for children at the time?

I don't really know. The parks were nice parks with playgrounds. My handy-dandy park was Whitaker Park. When Ralston Hill was snowy, they came from all over town with their sleds. In fact, Ralston Hill also had soapbox derby. There always seemed to be plenty to do. There wasn't a surfeit of, "Oh, now we go to this. Now we go to that." It is a different age now, but there was always something to do. There was ice skating at Idlewild and at Virginia Lake... at Manzanita Lake. Virginia Lake didn't exist until the WPA [Works Progress Administration] made it. I don't think it was an ice-skating venue, but Idlewild Park was and so was Manzanita Lake.

Can you tell me about your involvement with the Reno Chamber Orchestra when you came back to Reno?

The first thing I did was buy a season ticket for the Chamber Orchestra, and I was shocked when the newspapers came up with an article about the Chamber Orchestra being endangered. All of these musicians, ever since the Philharmonic came, have been union, so there was a players committee of the Chamber Orchestra. They had a meeting on August 18, 1997 to talk about the board deciding to replace Vahe Khochayan. I think it's pronounced "Ko-chai-an." Of course, I went and was very involved.

I had been delighted to attend a concert in which the Chamber Orchestra had a guest performer, Itzhak Perlman. Itzhak Perlman came, and yet the board was saying they had no money. How could an orchestra that was so good it could bring Itzhak Perlman... and I knew, since I inquired, that they auditioned. The musicians didn't even know they auditioned. Itzhak Perlman doesn't just come because you're offering him so much money. They auditioned, and he came. He enjoyed it so much that he came again two years later. They said they had no money, though. How could that be?

Anyhow, the musicians refused to play, and brought a class action lawsuit against the board. As a matter of final adjudication, they fired all the board and kept Vahe, and he stayed until 2003. To start with, the Chamber Orchestra was just some of the Philharmonic members who would like to play this other, more intimate music. He was a violinist. He definitely had the musicians. If he was playing a poker game against the board, who said that they had negotiated his contract in good faith, he definitely had the winning hand with

the players. He chose the music as now Ted [Kuchar], the current conductor, [chooses the music]. There have only been two conductors for the Reno Chamber Orchestra.

Was Vahe Khochayan the founding conductor?

Yes. It was 1997 when the board said, "We don't have any money." They thought if they changed conductors... they actually hired somebody else from San Francisco, and sort of fired Vahe. The musicians said, "What? What? No, you can't fire him." It was an argument over whether they had negotiated a contract with him, and surely they weren't going to pay the San Francisco conductor less than his contract. It was unacceptable to the musicians and to their audience.

Where were the Chamber Orchestra performances?

Mostly at the Nightingale Concert Hall. At Christmas and New Year time, they have no big concerts. They have smaller groups, which are what you usually think of as chamber groups—trios and quartets. Renowned musicians come to Reno from all over. Reno is the center of chamber orchestras during that week. They perform about half the performances at Nightingale and half the performances other places. One time, they played at the Presbyterian church on Plumb Lane. They also have wonderful acoustics at a church off Mt. Rose Highway. I've been there. It is a little difficult for me to get there, but once you find it, the acoustics are wonderful. They're world-renowned musicians who play in small groups, like trios and quartets.

How would you describe the quality of the Chamber Orchestra concerts?

I don't think there is any better anywhere. In fact, the current conductor is a world-renowned conductor. He conducts in San Francisco, in Czechoslovakia, and in Israel. He conducts all over the world. He says there is, in fact, no group of musicians equal to this group here.

Are performances well attended?

So well attended, that they decided, because expenses are so much greater, that they would not charge more per ticket, but they would do twice as many performances and try to get twice as many attendees. They have pretty well accomplished that. They fill Nightingale Hall twice each concert.

Are there any memorable concerts that you attended?

Besides Itzhak Perlman, oh, yes. In fact, some have been new compositions that were commissioned by a few orchestras—I think it was the Ford Foundation. There were two—one the one year and one another year. The Reno Chamber Orchestra has been one of the commissioners, which was expense, but it brings quality and updated music. Even that kind of music has changed somewhat from what Beethoven did, for instance, although some of those are rightfully famous.

I understand your sister was an artist.

She passed away in 2000 of a cerebral hemorrhage. She always drew. In fact, she was very ill when she was in the sixth grade. She had osteomyelitis, which means that the bone had been bruised. She was riding a horse in back of a friend. She was very tiny and she was hanging on, but that's all that was keeping

her on the horse. She was bouncing around on the horse and not really sitting very well. Finally, she fell off. It took some pretty fancy doctoring to discover what was wrong with her, and she was passed into the seventh grade on condition, because she had been out of school for a whole year. She had always liked to draw, but while she was bedridden, she drew and drew.

When she went to the University of Nevada, she majored in art. It was just after the war. Marilyn Melton—at that time she was not married; her name was Marilyn Royl—[and my sister] were the two female students of the Art Department.

J. Craig Sheppard felt that art was not a profession for women, at least not ad art, which was the only way you could make a living. He told them, “You don’t have the right kind of balls. Even if you’re a man, you have to have brass balls to be an ad artist.”

As I say, it was just after the war, and there was a world student fund. Marilyn told me about this. Marilyn was doing portraits at the gymnasium. She would do your portrait and you would give her money, and it would go to this world student fund. Vanna* redecorated Stewart Hall, which was to be demolished, but it was still there. She drew holes in the wall and drew. In all different languages, she had written, “They don’t have any books in Lower Slobovia.” The whole building was decorated that way. In fact, Marilyn told me it was in the *Sagebrush* at the time. I remember I took my little boys and we enjoyed looking. When she was drawing, she was doing the sign about Iran or Iraq, and somebody had drawn that word for her. She was trying to do it, and somebody was chuckling behind her. It was a student from that country, and he wrote it for her. Of course, it is from left to right with all the squiggles and stuff.

She was so discouraged by her third semester, though, that she went to San Jose

College. She excelled there and was just so happy. She got As and proved to herself that, indeed, she could do it. She had begun to think maybe Shep was right; she didn’t have what it took.

She kept having health problems. I don’t think she ever did graduate from any university. In 1957, though, she came back to Reno and worked for Tom Wilson Advertising Agency. In fact, they won a nationwide *Ad Art* prize for little old Reno with an ad for Chisholm Ice Cream and G_____. I think it was a Chisholm ad. The specific one that won such a wonderful prize was animated for television at that time. Vanna was able and good at that.

In 1957, she announced to her friends, “I’m going to Europe. Anybody want to go with me?” Well, four of them decided they would go. They were all new graduates out of university, were able to make money, and were professional women. They put their money in for renting a car. They were going to do their own thing, not a tour.

One of the people who had put her money in was Marvella Chandler*, a teacher. I think she taught mathematics. Anyhow, just before they left, she met a man and decided she didn’t want to lose him, so she didn’t want to go. She left her money in the pot, bless her heart.

The ladies went. They drove across the United States and they went on a tramp steamer. When they came back, they had been gone a year. In fact, the other ladies came home, but Vanna stayed in Amsterdam and was doing animated things that she wanted to sell. She got a job in London. She had a work permit because of her ability. She had this ability that nobody else had, so she stayed in London another year and did ad art.

When she came home, she did a book about that trip. There were no copy machines or anything like that at that time. She drew for

each of the ladies their own copy of this book. When she died so unexpectedly, I had Kinko's print the book. One of the ladies helped me. I printed 150 at first, and we gave them to people.

Around the time I printed the Fourth Street book, I went to Christine Kelly at Sundance Bookstore and asked if that book will have any market statewide or worldwide, and she thinks it will. Baobab, which is their printing company, is going to put it out. I think it will come out next year. Marilyn Melton has a copy.

Anyhow, she was a very good ad artist and she was able. For a long time she was afraid to start her own ad agency. When she first came back, she worked here a little while, and then she went down to San Francisco and worked for an ad agency that had their offices on the Embarcadero—on the wharf. Then she went into business for herself, and she had clients like an Italian bank. She had clients in so many walks of life.

When she passed away, she had been doing a third book—she had done two previously—for a man who printed a hiking book. One thing about Vanna's work is there were so many kinds. She did technical stuff. She did spooky stuff. You'll see in the cartoons she did funny stuff. She did portraits. You didn't look at a work of art and know who has done it. She was working on the third Colin Fletcher book. She illustrated it. That's why I say the technical stuff—nobody else could do it as well.

*It is the practice of the Oral History Program to verify the spelling of proper nouns whenever possible—either through research or with the assistance of the chronicler. In the case of this transcript, however, Beth Miramon unfortunately passed away shortly after the interview making such verification impossible. Phonetic representation has been employed when the actual spelling could not be determined, and these words have been marked by an asterisk throughout the text.

LEONARD OVERHOLSER

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Leonard Overholser: I was born in Ft. Benton, Montana in a very historic little town on the Missouri River where Lewis and Clark once encamped. There is a big statue of them right on the riverbank of the Missouri River. It was also the terminus of steamboats clear up from the Gulf of Mexico, 2,300 miles. The traders would come down with their pelts, trade them, and get their goods from the steamboats. The Whoop-Up Trail leading up to Calgary is also a part of that area. At one time, Choteau County was the largest wheat-producing county in the United States.

That is where I was born. However, I was raised in the state of Oregon. My father was an engineer and worked on several dam projects in Oregon, so I moved quite a bit. I graduated from high school in Oregon, from the Stayton Union High School. I then attended and graduated from the University of Oregon in Eugene, with a bachelor of science in general

social science, with the intent of going into teaching social studies at the high-school level and being a coach.

The military interfered with that, so I fought the battle of Fort Lewis, Washington, for two years as a dental assistant. That didn't lead me back into dentistry since I was already a college graduate. When I got out of the service, I decided that the pay for high-school social studies teachers was insufficient. So I went into industry, and eventually ended up in the banking industry in the trust and investment side of the business.

While I was in the employ of a major bank, they transferred me to Salinas, California. One day was papering the wall in my bathroom, when one of our neighbors came by and I said, "What are you doing?"

She said, "I'm auditioning for a play, *Guys and Dolls*, for the Salinas Performing Arts Group.

I said, "That sounds interesting."

She said, "Why don't you join us."

This was 1973, and I was bitten by the acting bug from that time forward. I

performed as an actor, even as a singer and dancer, in *Guys and Dolls*.

Eventually I moved back to the San Jose area, where I was associated with a repertory theater group called the King Dodo Playhouse. King Dodo Playhouse had the unique distinction of being a theater in the round, in which we performed one play on Friday, a different play on Saturday, and rehearsed for a third one during the week. It made for an interesting lifestyle. My wife somehow was able to cope with the fact I was gone quite a bit of the time. Anyway, I enjoyed it very much. We disbanded in 1985, and then I joined a group in Gilroy and performed there for three or four years.

Upon retirement in the year 2000, we decided to relocate and found Reno, much to our delight. Almost immediately, I saw an advertisement in the *Reno Gazette* for auditions for a repertory theater group that indicated it was a staged reading theater. I thought, "Wow, that's right up my alley." I went over and have been a part of the Ageless Repertory Theatre ever since.

Early on, we were known as the Ageless Reader's Theatre. We thought that was kind of compressive, so we decided we would make it the Ageless Repertory Theatre, meaning that we have a large repertory of plays that we can draw upon in order to entertain our audiences. We decided to perform during the daytime because there was a need for the elderly, the retired, and the handicapped to have access to a theater group performing plays that they would not ordinarily be able to afford or want to go out to in the evenings for, or for lots of various other reasons. Our focus has always been to perform during the daytime for those types of people, and it has proven to be a really enjoyable journey. Now, we're performing for between forty to sixty patrons each performance. We perform all the major plays that any of the well-known authors

have written, so that is just basically the thrust of where we are at this point.

What do you know about the founding of Ageless Repertory?

The lady who started Ageless Repertory Theatre was Shelly Young. Shelly had this vision to provide entertainment to seniors, so that's where it actually started. She was somewhat limited in funding, so we were performing one-act plays, vignettes, and those plays that are public domain so that we didn't have to incur the expense of royalties. We had a very limited budget at that time. We'll probably get into that a little bit later.

However, we worked together for about five years and then she decided to pursue other things as a writer. She had written plays. We actually performed one of her plays. She was the inspiration for the Ageless Repertory Theatre.

When she decided to do other things, I was one of the longest-tenured actors, so it fell onto me to keep it going. I'm very grateful for her participation, for her insight, and for her creativity to start this theater group.

Upon my taking over the directorship, we found that we should perform as a straight reader's theatre group. Many of the plays have a great deal of scenery, props, and other types of things that would detract from our performance, so we have decided upon strict interpretive Reader's Theatre presentations. This means that we read the scripts and, hopefully, interpret the writer's intention during the content of the play. So far, we feel that we have succeeded in that regard.

We have a number of seasoned actors that are up in years and decided this also was the type of theater they would like to be a part of. We have college professors. We have radio personalities and TV personalities and

we have even a person who did stage reading during her college days. So we have a wide variety. We even have some people that had never acted before, and it has really been a delight to watch them develop.

Since it is a reader's theater and you're reading the scripts, do you do blocking?

Yes, we do blocking of entrances and exits, and we do have some sound equipment for doorbells, telephones, door-knocking, and this type of thing. Sometimes we use musical accompaniment to highlight some part of the play. Some of the plays actually require it and royalties are necessary if you do comply completely with the script. In a play we have coming up, there is just two chairs on the stage, and the interplay between the two actors, hopefully, is interpreted sufficiently so that the audience doesn't even notice we're reading the script.

How would you describe the quality of the productions?

Well, from an artistic director's standpoint, I think they're fabulous. From our audience reactions, by and large, our productions are highly accepted for what we perform. Very rarely do we get any negative comment whatsoever. Some of the patrons prefer certain kinds of plays other than just comedies. They would like a thrust of some dramatic play. We find we're more on the comedic side of performing because that seems to lift the spirits of our audience quite a bit. I would say that the quality is superb.

Where do you rehearse and perform?

We're very fortunate to have an affiliation with the RSVP program, who are affiliated

with the University of Nevada. They graciously allowed us to use the Laxalt Auditorium here in the Nelson Building, primarily for our rehearsals, and also one day a week to perform when we're performing. We typically rehearse three times and perform two times, with one of them in the Laxalt. The other performance has been shifted around a little bit from public libraries to churches, and now we're performing at a local church.

One of the things [to consider], as an independent production company, is that the venue be very easy to access and have a consistent location because our audiences don't adapt too well. If you say you're going to be at a certain auditorium performing this play, they expect that that is where you will be. Sometimes we have been bumped when we didn't have full grasp of the venue, so that is why we love the arrangement with the university to use the Laxalt Auditorium.

By the way, Laxalt Auditorium is also a very fine theater-style auditorium and so we just thoroughly enjoy it. The acoustics aren't the best, I will have to admit. The church that we use has a lower ceiling, and so our voices can be heard throughout the church. Sometimes because of the ages of our patrons, they're cupping their ears to hear.

Are there any specific plays or productions that stand out in your mind or that you've particularly enjoyed putting on?

Yes, I can truthfully say that there are half a dozen that do stand out, one of them particularly. When we performed at the library downtown here in Reno, we performed *The Ladies of the Corridor*, which was written by Dorothy Parker. We had standing room only for that production. Well over a hundred people attended and we had never experienced that large an audience

before. It was because of the author and because the nature of the play. So that was one of the standouts.

Another one that we've done is *On Golden Pond*, and we have two very experienced older actors that perform as the Thayers, who are instrumental in that play. When the audience is brought to tears at the end of a production, you know that you've done something significant. We've done a couple that we brought back two or three times. One is about a lady who is taken advantage of by three crooks. She lives in the edge of a dump, in a dump, with her little cat. Again, at the end of the play she turns these robbers around so that they're benevolent, kind people. It's called *Everybody Loves Opal*. Those three come to mind immediately.

Then we've done some that are, shall we say, for mature audiences only. One of them is called *The Gin Game*, which Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn performed on Broadway. This one has, as we call it, R-rated language. So we always tell our audience, "Are you up to hearing some current words?"

One lady stood and said, "Len, we're eighty-five years old. We have heard everything." So that is the kind of thing...we're a little sensitive to the language. We don't want to just necessarily use the vernacular if we can avoid it.

Our play selection is interesting because for many years I picked the plays, cast them, and directed them. There comes a time when you say, "Well, why can't our performers pick the play, cast it, and do the directing?" So that is what we do now. We share that responsibility, and it's good because not all of us can be in every play.

We have about twenty in our group, and so everybody understands that sometimes you can't be picked for a particular play. Maybe there are only two parts lot of times;

other times, we want a full ensemble. For example, we're going to be doing *Our Town* during Artown in 2011. There are seventeen characters in *Our Town*, so, fortunately, everybody in our group can participate. On the other hand, like I say, for some of them there are just two people. For one play that is coming up, there will just be one performer. That is the extent of it.

What kind of marketing or publicity draws people into the performances?

There are two or three ways. Of course, we attempt to get into the local newspaper as often as we can. At this point in time, we're more successful than we have been in the past, when we weren't so well known and accepted. So we are able to get into the *Reno Gazette-Journal* as part of the entertainment on the entertainment pages. I recall just the other day that we were right next to Wayne Brady, who is a headliner here in town, so we are getting good support in that regard.

We do have a large mailing list, in which we indicate which plays are going to be produced for the next four months; that either goes out by e-mail or by snail mail. We prefer the e-mail, of course, because if something comes up and things change, we can correspond much easier. So we have about 350 people who are on our mailing list, and they refer their friends and neighbors and so on. So it's building. It's been building. We tend to want it smaller because it is more intimate if you have a smaller group. Our two venues are the right size for the clientele that we have.

Can you tell me about some of the other people who are involved in Ageless Repertory?

Yes, I can. George Randolph has been performing since 1973 here in Reno and he

was a part of the Reno Little Theater for all these years. George has gotten up in years. He is one of the performers in *On Golden Pond*, which we're going to be doing during Artown 2011. He is a very experienced, wonderful actor with a deep voice and can sing. He and I have done *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which is another memorable one, by the way. Again, it is a tearjerker, but it's comedic. Some of the lines are very comedic.

The other Thayer that is in *On Golden Pond*, Anne Marie McTaggart, who is an accomplished pianist and has accompanied many people who are soloists. She performs at one of the retirement homes regularly, like on a Friday afternoon, and plays classical music beautifully. She also is a wonderful actress.

Alicia Marsella was in all kinds of musicals on stage for twenty or thirty years in the Bay Area in Fremont. Sandra Orloff, started on the boards when she was five years old in Cleveland, Ohio, and has made her name on the stage. Her son is an accomplished actor and singer for a lot of the local productions. He recently was in *Meshuggah*, *Nunsense* down in Carson City, and was in *Fiddler on the Roof* in Fallon. Sandra is a very small, short lady, so lot of times she has to look up at her actors, but she holds her own in any acting situation. Those are the ones that come immediately to mind.

You said that you have about twenty active volunteers. Has that changed or grown over the years?

What has grown is the number of men who are part of the ensemble. For a long time we had to cast women in men's parts because there just weren't enough men who, I don't know why, they didn't feel the urge to be on stage. We accomplished some of our productions that way, which is not the best,

but at least we still performed. We have six to ten men. About four men come just every once in a while, but there are six men who now participate out of the twenty, so that is a good percentage. That is what I like.

How does the community seem to embrace Ageless Repertory?

Well, we're a not-for-profit organization, for one thing, and we don't charge for our performances. We do put out a basket seeking donations. The donations have sustained us, by and large, for the last five years anyway. We did have the affiliation with RSVP. There was some monies that came to us, but their monies have drifted out, so we no longer have that as a backstop. We got our 501(c)3 designation only about two years ago, so we would actively be interested in any grants—even small amounts—just to sustain us.

I often kid that we don't have enough money to send me to Hawaii this year, which is, of course, just kidding with the audience. It's just a way of getting their attention. They always seem to respond by their dollars or whatever they want to contribute. If we did get a grant or two, that would be very helpful to sustain us, and we could even do some of the more expensive plays. Neil Simon's plays are always \$125 a performance. That is a big chunk out of our budget.

What other expenses do you have?

Primarily our expenses are royalties, primarily for the publishing royalties. The royalties have gone up, like everything else. Of course, we have the expenses of paying for scripts. Most of the actors provide their own costumes, if we have any, or their props. Once in a while we do pay for that. We don't

reimburse anybody for transportation costs or anything like that. It is pretty well minimal expenses, I would say.

Incidentally, the Laxalt has not charged us for the use of the facility. The churches have typically charged us between twenty-five and fifty dollars each time we used it, and the library as well. It's about twenty or twenty-five dollars, even for rehearsals, so we couldn't sustain that kind of cost.

You said that, generally, audiences are about forty to sixty people. Would you say that that is a good audience for your performances?

Well, it's been going up. We used to average between twenty and forty people. Within the last two or three years it's gone to between forty and sixty. We feel very good about the size of our audiences, but more importantly, about their reaction. If they laugh when they should laugh and they cry when they should cry, we're reaching them and we're touching them. So the size of the audience is not indicative of success.

You mentioned that you perform a lot in the day as a way of opening up the performances to elderly people. Are there other groups of people that are a part of your audience?

I would say that we are attracting those who are available during the daytime. In some instances we have some people who take a long lunch hour, I suspect, because they're still working. We have performed at night, and we are going to perform during the evening at Artown this year so that expands our audience participation.

We have performed out of town and we have performed in the evening with the Reno Pop Symphony for one performance of *Ellis Island: A Dream of America*, which was really

a highlight of our background, I must say, because that was very moving. Here we are reading the scripts of immigrants who came to America in the early 1900s in front of a beautiful orchestra. It tested our capabilities; it was a little different.

We have performed original plays. We went down to Carson City. We've gone up to Winnemucca and performed there. So it is not a big wide geographic area, but we have been out of town. Some of our expenses were covered when we went to Winnemucca and to Carson City. Younger people have come just to see the method, I guess, but not too many of them come regularly. I would say it is primarily a mature audience that comes to our performances.

Besides considerations of royalties, are there special considerations or a philosophy to how you pick plays or what you think would be successful?

That's a very good point, because, as I say, our audiences tend to lean toward comedic performances. The actors, though, in order to continue their craft, don't always want to perform just comedies. From the audience standpoint, we try to pick plays that will be of general appeal. After many years, we know when we read a script that it is a good script and it is going to be acceptable and enjoyed as entertainment by our audiences.

I have the final say as to which play we will do and also how it's scheduled, just because we don't want to have the same kind of play one after the other. We like some variety. We want to be able to have ensemble pieces, plus one or two actor plays and four to six actor plays. You want to keep everybody involved that's in your ensemble, but the fact is there are innumerable plays that would be appealing to our audiences and you do have to be selective.

Some of the more modern plays, as I've indicated, have the tendency to use language that would be inappropriate for our audiences, so those are restricted. If there are plays that are too visual rather than word interpretation, we can't do those. If there are flamboyant scenes or costumes that are indicative or needed in the play, we can't do those. Our restriction is pretty much like if you were to hear a radio program and just put us behind a screen...that would be the kind of play that we would like to do so the audience hears the words and believes what we're saying and believes that we're interpreting the playwright's words.

How many performances do you have in a season?

We have two performances typically of one play, and so we rehearse three times and we perform two, so that covers a little over two weeks. We always are dark, as they say, in August so we can rejuvenate ourselves. So we probably do about twelve to fourteen plays a year. Sometimes we draw on our repertoire to bring back plays because people enjoyed them or a lot of people missed them. That is how many plays we typically perform, though, between twelve and fourteen.

What are you accomplishing during your three rehearsals?

The first rehearsal is typically to read through the play and do some of the blocking that is necessary—entrances and exits. Sometimes you can use the blocking that is in the script, but more often than not, you can't. So, first time is a read-through, the second time is for more interpretation, and the third is like a dress rehearsal. With the experience that our actors have, that seems to

work for us because of their experience. We don't fool around a lot when we're rehearsing. We know that we have to have it ready for our performance.

The decision to hand over some of the directing and other responsibilities to other people, what influence or effect has that had? How did people respond to that opportunity?

I don't see much change in their approval rating at all. Some of the actors-turned-directors don't want to direct anymore, because it's more responsibility. I don't see a drop-off in the approval rating of our audiences doing it that way. I think they respect us as actors.

Did they seem to embrace the idea of being able to direct plays? What was their reaction to that possibility?

Very positive, very positive. Some of them had plays in mind that they wanted to direct. There was great enthusiasm about that, yes. I was very pleased in that regard. Like I say, a couple of them said, "No, you can direct."

Of the twelve to fourteen plays that you do a season, how many of those are you directing?

About six; about half.

What are some of the biggest accomplishments of the organization?

Well, just the widespread acceptance of this type of play. I mean, most of the people that go to a play expect to see true acting, if you will. They've come to accept us as true actors, even though we're holding the script. That has been the biggest revelation to me. When we first started this, I had no idea that holding the script would be lost almost on

the first page of dialogue, and that is what has been so rewarding. There was a play where we were holding the scripts and we had to do all kinds of other little things, like drinking wine. We still are holding the scripts, but we're accepted. We have people that come from Sacramento....

Participation in Artown is also rewarding because they don't accept every type of entertainment. They screen. We've been performing for six years in Artown, so we're a part of that venue as well. Those are the two main ones. The performance before the Symphony was certainly a major accomplishment for us.

We perform a play called *Caregiver Collage*, which is comprised of a combination of people who are in caregiving situations. This has been performed before groups who are training caregivers, who want to know what they're getting into if they become caregivers. It's educational as well as entertainment. That is another accomplishment that comes to mind.

I was going to say, for our audiences, some people come up from Carson City and Lockwood, which isn't too far away. Lo and behold, we have people from Sacramento that come up. I said to this couple one day, "That is really nice that you dropped in."

He said, "We come up for every one of your performances specifically." We even have people from back east who come out for Artown and they always see our plays.

What have been some of the challenges?

Venues, primarily. Of course, losing experienced actors is always tough, when they move away or they have other responsibilities. You respect their decision to have to do that.

Challenges...one just came up recently where an actor said, "You know, I can't do

that part. It's too emotional for me. I'm an emotional person. I can't do it."

I explained to him, "You're an actor. That is what you convey is this part."

"I can't do it."

That's a challenge. [laughs] That doesn't happen too often. Most of the time, people ask, "What part do I have next? What am I going to do?"

What do you enjoy about doing Ageless Repertory?

I enjoy it because it's my outlet in retirement. I'm talking personally now. I found something that I really thoroughly enjoy all aspects of, and I've been given the chance to do this and to expand it. For me personally, it's basically my life in retirement. I still have responsibility at home and play a little game of cards now and then.

Because you have a schedule... unfortunately, some people don't have a schedule when they retire. Maybe they have a golf game this day or that, but I've got rehearsal dates, I've got this interview, and I've got business details that I'm responsible for relating to art. Certainly, of course, the ability to work with talented people is so rewarding. Thirdly, the audience is giving something back to you that you put out on stage. Oh, there's no greater feeling than to have a positive reaction from an appreciative audience.

How has Ageless Repertory changed over the years that you've been involved, if at all?

Well, primarily in the growth of our ensemble and the growth of our audiences, and in the acceptance of this type of theater in this local area. We're unique. I mean there are not a lot of places that have a reader's theatre. One thing came out of it—one of our actors

moved away and started Ageless Repertory Theatre II in Waterloo, Iowa, of all places.

Reader's theatre has been around a long time. We did a play called *Don Juan in Hell*, and some major actors in 1941 did the reader's theatre production in San Francisco and New York for *Don Juan in Hell*. We did it a couple years ago as a partial fundraiser. Reader's theater has been widely accepted and widely known all these years, but not very many places take it up.

Some plays are read for a playwright so that he can tweak the script, and so quite often that is done in a form of reader's theatre. Reader's theatre is kind of like radio, as I alluded to earlier, in that you're reading the script of a radio script and you don't necessarily have to be seen.

Who maintains Ageless Rep's website?

Cleb and Sharon Maddux, who are involved in our organization. Cleb developed the website. He's a professor at UNR. We're so pleased with it. Sometimes the artistic director doesn't keep up his part in writing his article for the website. [laughs] I think it's fantastic, though.

One of the spouses who also is a volunteer at OLLI, Terry Smith, is working on a brochure for us to hand out. That is the next step of getting the word out—primarily to seek grants and donations, but also to give information out about the theatre group.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about Ageless Repertory Theatre that you feel is important to include?

We're doing this as a part of OLLI's oral history project, and I'm just so thrilled that you would consider us as a part of that history. After ten years of survival in entertainment in

Reno, I feel very strongly that we're going to be around for several more years to provide the same kind of entertainment. I really appreciate being asked to provide some comments for you.

If somebody wanted to donate a permanent venue for us with plenty of parking and comfortable seats so we wouldn't have to even go from the Nelson Building to this church... of course, that is not going to happen. [laughs] There are a lot of empty buildings, though. I've thought about it a lot of times.

I know that you had been involved in the Nevada Shakespeare Company. Can you tell me about your involvement?

Yes, I was on the board of directors for four years and just concluded it in 2010. The true driving force of Nevada Shakespeare Company since 1999, when they started, is Cameron Crain. I do know in those early days they performed at the Piper's Opera House in Virginia City regularly, and eventually evolved into Reno proper. I'm not sure exactly where. The touchstone of Nevada Shakespeare and Company is Shakespeare, but they have expanded into other productions as well.

Jeanmarie Simpson, who was a very fine actress in the Nevada Shakespeare Company, wrote a one-woman play called *A Single Woman* and performed it. Eventually it was made into a documentary movie. She has moved out of the area, but at any rate, that was one of the highlights of the Nevada Shakespeare Company, to be involved in that particular production.

Primarily they've done innovative things like *King Lear*. They've done *Romeo and Julietish* and things like that. They've done some offshoots of Shakespeare, but the primary thrust is to do *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* as a true Shakespearian experience. They

have gone back to doing some outside plays. Their production schedule calls for other than Shakespeare this year.

Do you have a sense of what inspired the creation of the Nevada Shakespeare Company?

That's interesting. Well, these two people, Cameron and Jeanmarie, were both visionaries. I can say that they had a vision to make this comparable to the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Group, which later on they affiliated with. I think their vision was to make it a very prominent theatrical experience in Nevada.

How did you get involved in Nevada Shakespeare?

Well, when you're in theater, somehow theater folks get together. Jean Marie and Cameron attended our church at one time. I met them and they asked me to participate as an actor in a couple of their productions. It just seemed like a natural, because I liked the people, so I become involved. They had a board opening and they asked me to become involved in the board, and so that's how I got elected.

What did being a board member entail?

Primarily it involved fundraising in support of the activities and for the productions by either direct participation or by doing support work, like running the concessions, taking tickets, or building sets—anything dealing with real theater production. In addition, venue was always an issue with—Nevada Shakespeare as well. They got moved around quite a bit. I know that that would be one of the things they would like

to have—a Nevada Shakespeare Theater downtown somewhere.

Does Nevada Shakespeare have an outreach program?

Oh, yes, they definitely do. They have done Shakespeare in the schools for years, which is really valuable. That is throughout northern Nevada even into other states. That is their primary outreach, to bring Shakespeare to the younger generations, and it's a marvelous program. They had some marvelous actors doing multiple parts of Shakespeare productions or excerpts from the plays.

Where have they been able to do performances?

Churches. They've performed here in the Laxalt Auditorium. They performed at the Museum of Art for a while. Let's see. They performed in patrons' backyards. They did it at First United Methodist Church for quite a while. It is not like Reno Little Theater, who now has a building. Gold Hill performed up there. I know they performed *Single Woman* in Sacramento about five years ago. Well, they performed it all over the country. It took a lot of the emphasis from the other productions when they did *A Single Woman* production.

How would you describe the quality of the productions?

Topnotch. The acting was superb. Every actor that I saw perform with them was very experienced. They drew on high-school drama students. College students performed. They were able to draw on a number of areas to get the best actor for the part. Yes, bar none, I would say they were superior in their acting.

Do you remember some of the productions that you worked on?

I was involved in a production called *Still Nacht* or *Still Night*. I was also in *Julius Cesar* as Cicero. I assisted in various ways in *A Single Woman*. I was involved with those three primarily.

Still Nacht was a World War I play about the Germans and the English who were fighting, and for Christmas Day they stopped the war. They're shooting each other, and just stopped fighting in the trenches, and went out and played a game of football. Then they went back and started shooting each other the next day. It is a very poignant play.

We just talked about *A Single Woman*. The primary... Jeannette Rankin, from the state of Montana, by the way, is the only elected official to vote against the United States' entry in both World War I and World War II. She stood up with thirteen others in World War I in the House of Representatives. She was the first woman elected to the United States House of Representatives. She stood up with thirteen others and said, "No, don't go into World War I." She was the only one in World War II, when the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. The president called for a unanimous vote; she stood up and said, "No, I cannot. I have to vote my conscience. I vote no." What a woman. Oh, my gosh. What a Play!

In terms of active volunteers and performers, how many people would you say are involved in the organization?

It's an informal organization outside of the board and the directing team. I would say they can draw on about thirty or forty people aside from the board and the acting team. They have six on the board and the director.

They have costumes, props, scenery, lighting, and personnel.

Who are some of the other people that are involved in the board?

Certainly people that are interested in theater in one way or another. Some of them are actors. They have a director currently. They've drawn on people of various backgrounds. They have an attorney on board now, a CPA, and people who have a little bit of clout in the professional area. They're always searching, though, for people who have a financial sales bent to raise the funds that are necessary to maintain a budget. They draw on a lot of grants. Like Shakespeare in Schools, they have certain organizations that have granted money to them to continue that program throughout the state.

What is your sense of how the community receives Nevada Shakespeare?

I think they're highly respected. They were diverted for a period of time from their main thrust, so I think it's taken them a while to get back into the primary focus of where they want to be in terms of providing sincere, quality Shakespearian productions. They're trying to rebuild their image that they once commanded. That's my assessment.

How well attended have the performances been?

The ones that I'm aware of have had about sixty to a hundred people. Of course, they have several performances, so if you multiply that times five or six, then you get three hundred to five hundred.

What is the season in terms of performances?

I think they might have a spring and a fall season.

Is there a charge to attend the performances?

Yes. They're anywhere from ten to twenty dollars. Students would be maybe ten to fifteen dollars. It could be more now. I don't know.

Do you have a sense of the type of audience that they draw?

Theater-type people, people who really enjoy Shakespeare, and people who really enjoy proscenium-type theater.

Over the time that you were involved with Nevada Shakespeare, has it changed at all over the years?

Well, it changed when Jeanmarie Simpson left the organization and moved away, in the sense that it was Cameron who just assumed the full responsibility. It was a shared responsibility before that time.

When you came to Reno back in 2000, what were your impressions of Reno?

I had no idea of the cultural capability of this city. I've just been amazed at the opportunities to enrich us. The symphonies, all the activities at the university and their theatrical productions, the plays that are available around town, and the celebrity entertainment in the casinos. If anybody would ask you, "Why are you moving to Reno?" If I would say, "Because of the cultural activities, the art, the music, and the theater," it would blow their mind. They just

don't understand the cultural opportunities, because they think of Reno as being only the casinos, the celebrity entertainment, and the gambling. As you know, that is an integral part of the community, but it is not the only side of Reno. It is a university town. We've seen a number of productions at Nightingale Hall. There are wonderful, talented actors at UNR. I didn't have any idea what was available. So, I'm glad I'm here.

In the decade or so that you've been in Reno, have you seen any changes?

One of the major changes is when Artown came into being. It really opened up this area for an influx of visitors from all over. The entertainment that has come as a part of Artown is fabulous. That is primarily what I see here. I mean, that's the most visible. I think the Reno Philharmonic is fantastic. Laura Jackson is the conductor and a great addition. I'm just so amazed at the music that is available and the experienced musicians that are in town. We have a combo at our church and they've all been professionals playing for all the big names in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. OLLI just came into existence here, too, and that has been very beneficial.

CAROL PARKHURST

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me about where you were born and where you grew up?

Carol Parkhurst: I was born in Richland, Washington, which is in eastern Washington close to the border of Oregon on the Columbia River. I lived there for eighteen years and then went to college at Pullman, Washington—Washington State University—followed by the University of Washington. I got my master's degree there in library science.

Can you tell me about your parents and what they did?

My mother was a housewife. There were four children. I'm the eldest of three girls and one boy. My father was a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Did he have a specific focus or type of case that he would work on?

Yes. In Richland, Washington, the industry was the Hanford atomic energy plant, which

was all very high security, particularly in the 1950s and early 1960s. There were actually six or seven FBI agents in that community who did security work—background checks, watching foreign agents when they came, and that kind of thing. That is what my dad did.

Did he work an eight-to-five kind of schedule?

Mostly, yes. It was a long day for him, but mostly he was home. He did have to go to Seattle and sometimes Washington, D.C. for training and meetings. Most of the time, though, he wasn't called out. There were some things like bank robberies... the FBI is in charge of any kind of federal crime, like interstate transportation-related issues or bank robberies. He did get involved to some extent with that. I don't think he ever actually shot anybody. It wasn't Chicago, but it was interesting.

You've mentioned where you went after high school, but can you tell me a little bit about the schools that you went to for elementary school, middle school, and high school?

I went to Jefferson Elementary School. At the time I would guess there might have been six or eight elementary schools in Richland. Richland, when I was growing up, was around 16,000 people in population. Almost everyone either worked out at the Hanford atomic energy site or was in some kind of retail, education, or other kind of support industry. There wasn't any other industry in Richland itself.

One of the interesting facts about Richland was that it had the fifth highest per capita Ph.D.'s in the country, because so many of the people who worked out at the Hanford plant were scientists primarily. There were nine plutonium reactors, which at that time were all being operated, and there was a lot of research. There still is a lot of research that is done out there. It is still an active operation, but the plutonium reactors have all been shut down.

So, I went to Jefferson Elementary School, kindergarten through sixth grade. Then I went to a middle school for grades seven, eight, and nine. Then I went to high school, which at that time was called Columbia High School. It is now called Richland High School. There was only one high school in the city during the time I was there, so it had a large student body. We had about 400 to 425 students in my graduating class. I graduated fourth in my class.

Can you tell me about any art or music programs that were in your school?

Oh, definitely. I started playing the violin when I was eight years old. I think I was in fourth grade. I had private lessons with a lady. My mom and dad rented a violin for the first year or so and I had lessons.

I don't recall there was any music program until junior high. When I got to junior high, I

believe we had something, although it doesn't flash [in my mind]. I know in high school we had an orchestra. It was very small, but we had a teacher, we had a little orchestra, and we learned music. We went to the state music association conventions and I played in the state orchestra. It was like a contest to get in that orchestra. They still have that kind of thing. I was very active in violin and I continued that up until about six years ago.

Was music a big part of your family?

Yes. My father was an organist and a pianist. He actually played the organ for our church and the church choir. He was a very good pianist. He could improvise. He could just take a tune and put all the chords around it, as well as being classically trained. He was a very good musician.

My mother played the cello when she was young, but she didn't actually play when I knew her.

My next sister was a pianist. She is eighteen months younger than me. Her name is Janice Marie. She played the piano.

My brother played the drums. My youngest sister was a ballet dancer, actually a professional ballet dancer.

In terms of Richland as a city, was there a lot happening within the community in terms of culture?

There was a symphony. There was the Mid-Columbia Symphony, which was a regional symphony, so it included people from all of the tri-cities. The tri-cities are Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland. The community was actually larger than just Richland.

We had a really good conductor who came in from Yakima. I don't think he was local. I played in that symphony from the eighth

grade. I was one of the only young people in the symphony. It was mostly adults. I did play, though, so I had a lot of experience in symphony orchestra playing from quite a young age.

There was a very good theater. The Richland Players were active at that time and they still are. They do three or four plays a year and they are very good. They had Community Concerts as well.

Can you tell me about when you first came to Reno and what brought you here?

I came here to work. I came here for a position at the university. I was hired in 1979 and started that summer. My official contract actually started in the fall. I came first on a one-year appointment to work on the computers in the library. They were very new at that time in running a mini computer-based circulation system in the library. I was hired to sort that out and get the thing running. It was a joint system with the Washoe County Library.

After a year, the university library decided that it needed a systems librarian—a librarian in charge of computing and all the related things—so they did a national search. At that time there were very few systems librarians in the world, so I got the job. I believe there were six applicants. I was hired on a tenure-track position and I stayed there for thirty-one years.

When you had the joint system with the Washoe County libraries, were you working with Martha Gould?

Yes, I was. She was the Director of the Washoe County Library.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first came here? Did you have any expectations?

I didn't know much about Reno, but I had been here a couple of times. In the year before I came, I worked for a company that was actually selling computers to libraries, and UNR was a client. That is how I came to know Hap Morehouse, the director of the university libraries—I was training and helping them as part of my job with this computer company.

When I came to Reno, I had been here a few times. I knew how beautiful it was and that there were mountains and everything. I didn't know much about the community, though. Obviously, it was much smaller in 1979, and that happened to be a time when it was very hard to find a place to live. Rental occupancy was 99 percent. I couldn't even find an apartment. So for a while it was really dreadful. I think it was for two or three months that I had to live in one of these communal apartments where you have a bedroom and you share a kitchen with people you have never met. It was really grim.

Then I was looking for an apartment and I went up to the Westwood Apartments up above the university on Sierra. They are still there. I walked in to put my name on the list, and she looked at me and said, "Well, who are you and what do you do?"

I said, "I'm on the faculty. I've been hired to work at the university."

"Okay, you're in," she said. She gave me an apartment and I moved the next month and lived there for several years.

Where was this communal apartment?

It was on Harvard Way over near Costco. I believe those apartments still exist. It's nothing I recommend.

What types of expectations or hopes did you have in terms of culturally what would be happening in Reno?

I got in on the Reno Philharmonic very early on. Within the first year I went to see the violin teacher at the university. His name was Harold Goddard. He was the violin person at the time in the music department. I played for him and he said, "You need to be in the symphony." So he called the conductor, Ron Daniels, and said, "You need to hire this woman." I was in. I played in the symphony for twenty-five years after that.

Was the Reno Chamber Orchestra in existence? Musically what else was happening or what was around?

I believe the Reno Chamber Orchestra was going then, under Vahe Khochayan. Early in the 1980s I did play with the Chamber Orchestra. I can't remember what year, but I did play for ten or eleven years with the Chamber Orchestra. At the same time I was also playing with the Symphony, and to some extent playing in the clubs. I was doing a lot of that, particularly in the first three years I came—1980 through 1983. I got married in 1983 and I discontinued playing in the clubs.

Would playing in the clubs include your time with the Johnny Russell Orchestra?

Yes. The Johnny Russell Orchestra was the relief band for a number of the casinos—the John Ascuaga's Nugget, for Harrah's in Reno and Harrah's at South Shore, and there may have been others. The Johnny Russell Orchestra was actually owned and operated by Johnny Russell and he personally hired all the members as needed to do each show. Some shows would include only winds and horns, and some shows included strings. When they needed strings and when they needed up to

six strings, I would be called and I would play. Usually I would only participate one or maybe two nights a week.

What a relief band is... a house band would work for six nights. The permanent members of the house band at, say, Harrah's, would be on call or would work six nights a week, assuming that the entertainer needed a band. Then on the seventh night, they had to have a day off, so the Johnny Russell Orchestra would come in and play that show.

We played with one rehearsal. We went in the afternoon and ran the show. We had to just read the charts one time through. They are usually handwritten. It is a very different experience from a symphony orchestra, where the music is all very neat and tidy, you study it, and then you rehearse five or six times. It is very different. You waltz in, you sit down, and you play the show.

It was very frightening the first few times, but I really enjoyed it. It was a big challenge and it was a lot of fun. You play with a microphone on your violin—stuck on there—so you don't want to make any big mistakes. I got to see a lot of interesting and good entertainers. It was fun.

Do you remember how you got on the list of people that would be called?

I knew some of the key string players. Marilyn Sevilla was one of them, as well as Janet Snape. Several people I knew in the symphony who also played in the Reno Chamber Orchestra knew me and my work and recommended me. So, I got a call. Since I did well enough, I continued to be called.

Are there other notable people that were involved with the Johnny Russell Orchestra besides the ones you've just mentioned?

Well, Jeff Leep was involved. He is a bassoon player.

I'm assuming because it was a relief band that they weren't then a part of the casino bands.

No. It's an independent operation. They would just hire Johnny, and he, in turn, would hire us. We would all show up. That is all that was.

For the people that were part of the Johnny Russell Orchestra, do you have a sense of what sort of day jobs these people had and what their backgrounds were?

Many of them were attempting to make a living as performing musicians, which at that point was somewhat possible. After about 1983 or 1984, they really dropped a lot of the live orchestras and it became almost impossible. Some of them were teachers, but that was tricky because you had to show up for an afternoon rehearsal. Many of them taught privately and they had their own studios.

Valerie Nelson is another name I can remember. Valerie runs a music school for little kids under five. She was able to make arrangements, so she played sometimes.

You mentioned that you were able to play with some memorable performers.

I guess my favorite one of all time was Sammy Davis Jr. I played at many shows with Sammy Davis. He was the consummate professional, and so enjoyable. He was always very nice to the orchestra. Afterwards he would always have a party, which is very unusual. That usually didn't happen. He would have booze and he would come and talk to us. He was great. I played for many others.

When you rehearsed in this afternoon rehearsal, where would that be held?

Usually in the showroom. Once in a while it would be in the casino in a different place, but usually in the showroom. I remember that it was sometimes hard to find the showroom because we would have to enter from backstage. It is easy enough to find the front, but you had to learn how to get backstage, which took some doing.

What effect did the casino shows in Reno at the time have on the musical community in Reno?

I think it had a huge effect. I think the fact that many fine musicians came to this town to work in the showrooms, earlier than the 1980s, really... they came in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result of that, there were some very strong musicians who could play in the two orchestras—in the Reno Philharmonic and the Reno Chamber Orchestra. There, of course, were very strong musicians at the university, which also were a part of those orchestras. Primarily that is who was in the orchestras—people who had played in the showrooms either previously or still did, and people who worked at the university. Those were the majority.

I'm assuming that the casinos weren't keeping on staff full orchestras for their shows.

Oh, for sure. The use of live musicians in the casinos dropped lower and lower. At this point I don't believe there are any house bands. Once in a while there is a pick-up band, but most of the entertainers just hire piecemeal when they come or they bring their own people.

Did you have any sense of why casinos were doing away with their house bands?

Money. It was just too expensive.

As casinos got away from using a house band, how did that effect musically what was happening in Reno?

Well, that is a good question. Many of the people who were in those house bands I think are still in Reno. Some of them just have other jobs, and many probably still play. Other people I knew in those bands, many of them are still here and are still playing in the orchestras or doing their thing. I didn't know so much what happened with the wind players; I mostly knew the string players. I still see a lot of the people that were in those shows. Some of them are not from Reno, but Carson City. There were a few that I knew came quite a bit from Carson City. It was kind of regional in a way.

In terms of the Philharmonic, how is it different musically, or just in general, from the other musical groups that have been around Reno?

The Reno Philharmonic is a full symphony orchestra, and so their repertoire is generally somewhat different from the Chamber Orchestra repertoire, which tends to be a smaller group, fewer strings, fewer winds, smaller scale. There's a lot of overlap in the repertoire that can be played, but, in general, that's the distinction, is that the Chamber Orchestra is smaller. They play in a smaller venue, on a smaller stage. They are many of the same people. There are a few people who play only in the Philharmonic or only in the Chamber Orchestra, but most of them play in both.

The conductor now is Ted Kuchar. It was Vahe Khochayan who founded the Reno Chamber Orchestra. I did want to mention something about that. The Reno Chamber Orchestra prides itself on having been founded by casino musicians. They formed their own orchestra. At that time, Vahe was a casino violinist. I never heard him play the violin, but that is how they all got together. They said, "Well, we should have an orchestra." I don't know how Vahe became the conductor, but he did, and that is how the Reno Chamber Orchestra actually started.

The Reno Pops... I've never actually been to a Reno Pops concert. That is a community orchestra as opposed to a professional, paid orchestra, which the Chamber and the Phil both are.

One of the big changes in the early days with the Philharmonic... in the first few years that I was there, Ron Daniels became the official conductor and they decided to make it an auditioned orchestra. In order to be a contract player in the Reno Philharmonic, you had to audition and pass this audition. They did audition all of us at that one time, which was in the early 1980s; I did make the audition and was given a contract. They didn't give contracts to everyone. Many people played, though, even though they didn't have a contract. What a contract means is that you are entitled to play every concert, assuming your instrument is required. They don't really have a choice—they can't stop calling you if you are a contracted player.

Most of us were members of the musicians union, which is no longer a force to be reckoned with at all, but it was then. The musicians union was very important to the casino showroom bands and helped them out a lot in negotiating wages. You could also get insurance, if you needed it, through the

musicians union. I think it is only a small presence now.

So the Chamber Orchestra... since I haven't played for so long, I don't really know, but I believe that is more of an invitation-only orchestra. You're invited to play. I'm not sure they do formal auditions.

Who founded the Philharmonic?

Gregory Stone.

Was he still around when you started?

No, he wasn't. I believe that the very first year I came was the first year that Ron Daniels was conducting. I've never met Gregory Stone. He was the previous conductor.

How popular was the Philharmonic? Did people seem interested in playing for the Philharmonic?

Yes, sure. At this point, of course, I have no idea how many people actually come to their auditions, but they manage to fill the sections. If you look at the players' list when you go to the symphony, they note which ones are contract players. There is a star or something next to the name and it will say at the bottom "contract player." Maybe half the people are contract players.

They used to bring in people from out of town. For a while, under Barry Jekowsky particularly, he would bring in key people, like a particular wind instrument when there wasn't anyone local that he felt met his standards. I don't know how much of that is still done. I don't necessarily know where they are from, now that I've been away from it for a while. If it's a name I don't recognize, I don't always know if they are someone local

or from out of town. There were a few for a while, though, mostly in the winds but even strings on occasion, to fill in sections.

As a contract player you had a guaranteed you a spot if you wanted it. Did it include payment?

Oh, yes. Everyone gets paid. Whether you are contract or not doesn't affect how much you are paid. There is just a set amount that is negotiated between the Players Committee and the orchestra. The union used to be involved (maybe they still are), and they determined how much you would get for one concert. It doesn't matter how many hours you play. In other words, some musicians might only play one piece out of three, but they get the same amount. As long as they are at a rehearsal, they get the rehearsal fee. Then at the end of the concert, you would wait a week and then a check would come in the mail. That would be your compensation.

Based on how much you were being paid, did people still have day jobs?

Oh, yes, or they had spouses who worked. It certainly is not a living wage.

What was it that you liked about being involved in the Philharmonic?

I just wanted to play. It was nice to get paid and certainly made it easier to swallow on nights you didn't particularly want to go. I really just wanted to be in the orchestra and play, and I really enjoyed it. Sometimes it would get tedious and oftentimes it involved quite a few hours of practicing. I mean, you had to learn these parts and they can be very difficult. There was a lot of time involved.

One time I thought about each concert. I would estimate that I practiced from fifteen to twenty hours for a concert. That is before the rehearsals. Then you would go to... I think it was five rehearsals and then the concert. This is all in the week prior. Rehearsals are not one a week or anything. It is all smashed together. The rehearsals are in the evening because that would accommodate everyone who works. They had a rehearsal on Saturday morning. It was usually four weeknights and then Saturday.

The schedule now is that the Symphony plays on Sunday afternoon and Tuesday evening. There used to be only one concert, but sometime back they went to two. The Chamber Orchestra plays two concerts as well. They play on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. They all have to coordinate, because it's all the same people, including the Opera. The same people play in the Opera too.

Where were rehearsals and performances for the Philharmonic?

At the Pioneer Theatre.

What is the condition of Pioneer, and how is it as a facility?

Well, the condition seems like it hasn't changed very much to me, even after all these years. It works. The acoustics have never been considered to be very good. It depends on where you sit in the auditorium. It can be very odd, actually. To play in it is not bad. You can generally hear yourself and your colleagues. They have over the years used different shells—a shell that goes behind—and those have been improving the situation. It's not at all ideal from an acoustical point of view, but it works okay as a venue.

I think they replaced all the seats at one time. Other than that, I really don't remember any big renovations. The Chamber Orchestra plays at the university in Nightingale Concert Hall, and that is a much nicer venue. The acoustics are much better. Of course, it only has about six hundred seats, and the Pioneer has around fifteen hundred.

Besides the acoustics, is there anything else about Nightingale Hall that makes it a nicer place to play?

Well, actually it is less nice in a way, because there's not a very good place for performers to be. There are the wings on the side, but you don't want to just stand there. In order to go to another room and warm up, change, or get ready, you have to go downstairs. At the Pioneer they have a real backstage area with dressing rooms, little mirrors, and seats. Actually, from that point of view, it is pretty nice. There was a place to stay if you were not playing in a particular part of the program or waiting.

For the concerts at the Philharmonic, are there pieces that you remember performing or that are especially memorable?

I would say that would be very difficult, although for some reason I always remember the Mahler concerts. I think Ron Daniels did a particularly excellent job with Mahler. We did several of the Mahler symphonies. They are very challenging and huge works, which is why I remember. I always enjoyed Beethoven's *Ninth* with the choir. We did most of the standard repertoire over a period of twenty-five years—all the major composers, certainly, and some modern works. There was never a big emphasis on new composers. The

audiences don't really like it and they need to keep people coming.

They are trying now to throw in some modern compositions. By modern, one can mean many different things, but anything composed within the last twenty-five years most people would consider modern. I enjoyed those from the point of view of they were something different, but mostly I loved the standard repertoire.

The soloists... oh, wow. We had some fabulous soloists. The Chamber Orchestra brought [Itzhak] Perlman in and we played with him. Of course, I will never forget when Pavarotti came. He came twice and I played in the Orchestra with him. That was at Lawlor Events Center, which is a much bigger venue. There have been many fine soloists, and that was always fun.

To play with a soloist, does that require any more preparation than a general concert?

Most concerts have one work that a soloist plays. It is the usual thing. It is just different to play with a soloist. You are accompanying so you have to watch the balance and not overwhelm the soloist. Usually it's up to the conductor to make that happen. It is very hard for an individual musician to influence how well this interplay goes with a soloist. That really has to be the conductor. Some are better at it than others.

How would you describe the quality of the concerts that the Philharmonic has put on over the years?

I think it's absolutely amazing how good that symphony is. It is just amazing. It has gotten better and better. Ron Daniels did a bang-up job. He was the conductor for ten

years. Then it went to a whole new level when Barry Jekowsky came in. It really did. He expected more. He was a more experienced conductor. Then they hired Laura Jackson just recently, and she is a very fine conductor. So they just keep getting better and better.

I don't know to this day how they attracted Ted Kuchar to the Reno Chamber Orchestra. He is internationally well known. It is amazing for this size of community to have these orchestras.

Had you retired by the time Laura Jackson was hired?

I did. I never got to play with her.

Were Philharmonic performances well attended?

Yes. In fact, that is why they went to two concerts. It was probably at least ten years ago. There was so much interest and so many people did come that they went to two concerts. They still do two, and they are quite well attended.

Are ticket sales a good source of funding for the program?

The concert tickets only pay for a certain percentage of the budget. I wouldn't know what, but I'm guessing 35 to 40 percent at the most. They have to get grants and they have a large endowment fund that people over the years—well-off people—have contributed to. The orchestras have done very well financially. There are a lot of orchestras in this country who are struggling mightily to try to continue. One of the reasons I think they are continuing to be financially viable is community support and donor support.

They have a very fine professional staff, but they don't have full-time musicians. The orchestras that are really having trouble are the ones who try to support people full-time. Not all of them are having trouble, but many have had serious trouble because they have these huge salary commitments. The Reno Philharmonic has never done that and doesn't need to do that.

There are only six concerts a year in a regular season. They have added other concerts that are fun and interesting and make money for the orchestra. They do the summer concerts and that kind of thing. They've done very well.

Now, to attend it is pretty expensive, but there are levels of tickets. I was just looking at next season's tickets; I believe it is around \$370 for the six concerts for the best seats. They do have a senior rate. If you buy the top seat, though, it is over \$60 a concert for one person. That is perfectly standard throughout the country, but it can seem kind of expensive. You can also get lots of less expensive seats, and they have student rates, too. I think a student can walk in in the last half hour before the concert for either five or ten dollars.

As a contract musician, besides playing at concerts, are there other things that the Phil has asked of you, like being involved in fundraising or attending special events?

Very infrequently. That didn't happen very much. I remember a couple of times playing some fundraisers. It was quite a few years ago, and it was always fun. It was something we didn't mind doing. They didn't ask that very much, and I think one of the reasons is the union. The union wouldn't have allowed it on a very regular basis.

Have you seen any other large changes in the Phil over the years?

I think when Tim Young came in... that was another ratcheting-up of expertise. I don't even remember who the other executive directors were. They have had several. Tim Young came in probably seven or eight years ago. He is a very fine professional executive director with a lot of symphony experience. He certainly has got a good staff and they run a good operation.

As a musician, would you have a lot of interaction with the board members, the executive director, or the staff members?

No, not unless you were on one of the committees. There are musicians on the Symphony board. They are elected. After I retired, I was on one of the Symphony committees—the Artistic Committee—for a while and I really enjoyed that. I got to work with Tim and the other members of that committee. I would say they have a very good board. They have always attracted good people. It is a good organization.

How did you get involved in the Reno Chamber Orchestra?

I think they just invited me. There was no audition. They didn't do that then and I'm not sure they do now. I think they just asked me to come.

Who was the conductor?

Vahe. He was the only one I worked with, because I had quit doing Chamber Orchestra quite a while back. It was before they brought in Ted.

How did you balance being involved in multiple musical groups?

I was really busy and I was working really hard. I had very time-intensive positions all through my time at the university. I was just pretty much on the go most of the time. I loved it. It was fun. Now I do nothing. I'm balancing, you see. The first part of my life was so intense with having to be here and there and everywhere, now I don't do too much. I am making it up.

Are there notable people that were involved in the Chamber that stand out for you?

Musicians? Well, Marilyn Sevilla was a founding member, and Valerie Nelson. There was a core of people.

Was there a similar rehearsal structure for the Chamber as the Philharmonic?

Yes, it was, in terms of the number of rehearsals. I recall maybe five rehearsals. The Chamber Orchestra had the disadvantage that they couldn't rehearse always in the venue because Nightingale Concert Hall is just too busy. I think they only had the dress rehearsal at the Nightingale and the others were usually in the band room in a school that would let them play. It was not ideal, but it worked.

You mentioned the Nevada Chamber Music Festival. Can you tell me about it?

It is a wonderful event. The Chamber Orchestra staff puts on an annual Chamber Music Festival. I think it is going to be their fourth year, but it may be their fifth. It is easy enough to find out online. They have been doing this for some years, though

not forever—five or six years. They bring in fabulous musicians from all over the country who know Ted Kuchar. They play chamber music and they play different configurations, from duets to octets. It's not orchestral music. It is small chamber music—a lot of string quartets, clarinet quintets, and piano trios. Those are the kinds of things they do.

These are just fabulous musicians. They probably don't rehearse these pieces more than once, because they just come in for the week. They have four days of concerts. They do an afternoon and an evening concert for four days the week between Christmas and New Year's. Their final concert is on New Year's Eve. I love it. It is so much fun to go to the concert. All the performances are very well attended; people come.

They do some of the concerts at the South Reno United Methodist Church down on the Mt. Rose Highway. They do the other concerts in Nightingale, but they don't do them all in the Nightingale. I think it's due to cost. It is a fabulous thing, though. It's something that Reno really should be proud of. It is very unusual, and at this time of year there certainly is no other chamber music festival. Most festivals are in the summer, so it is pretty special.

Who's responsible for organizing the festival and getting it together?

It would be the Chamber Orchestra's executive director, Scott Faulkner. He, his staff, and Ted are the ones who are behind this and put it together. Scott is great. He is a string bass player.

Had you served as a board member for the Chamber?

I did. That was a long time ago—in the nineties, I guess. I was on the board for three or four years. We were struggling then. That was when things were really hard with money, finances, and everything. We did do the big gala for Itzhak Perlman during that time, and that went really well. It was in a casino. I believe it was at the Grand Sierra, which would have been something else at the time. I don't remember too much about it, other than the fact that it was kind of hard to put together.

Do you remember any of the responsibilities you had as a board member?

Mostly what boards are worried about is money and fundraising. That is primarily what they do.

Did Reno embrace and support the Chamber Orchestra?

Oh, they've always had a loyal following, yes. It is bigger now. They have been so successful under Ted Kuchar. I see a lot of people at both concerts, whichever one you go to. They have very good attendance and support.

Typically for a season, how many performances does the Chamber have?

I think it is five. For a regional orchestra like this, I think five performances is pretty typical.

How do they go about choosing what they perform in a given season?

That is primarily up to the music director, who is the conductor. Usually there is a committee. I know the Reno Phil has the Artistic Committee,

but the selections are generally made by the conductor and then run by the committee. She might come in and say, "Here are some ideas. Which do you prefer?" Coming up with these programs and making them all seem reasonable is really up to the musical director.

Is there any consideration for the season in which a piece is going to be played?

Well, sometimes there is a theme. They always give a title to the different concerts. It is amazingly interesting how these titles fit with the music. At this point, for the symphony concerts, they call them all Master Classics. It is just an umbrella thing, but that all comes from the musical director.

Has there been a conductor that you've especially enjoyed playing with?

Well, I've enjoyed them all. You really do have to have a big ego to be a conductor. I don't think you could do it otherwise, or not be very effective. There are always difficult times, not for me personally so much, but it can get tense. I do understand that Laura Jackson is very fun to work with and she isn't as raging of an ego as some have been, shall we say. For the most part, I wouldn't have played if I hadn't enjoyed it.

Are there other musical groups that you've been involved with that I haven't asked you about?

Just my string quartet. I played in a string quartet for fifteen years with local people. We all were in the symphony. It was organized by Peter Winkler, who is a violinist and also a physics professor. He graduated from a conservatory of music in Europe. We played recitals. We actually did recitals, usually two or three a year, for a long time.

Did the group have a name that it performed under?

High Noon String Quartet. The reason we were called High Noon is because in the first years we always rehearsed at noon at Peter's house. He lived right next to the university. That was very convenient, so we got together once a week and practiced at noon.

Do you remember other people who were involved in that?

Bruce McBeth was the viola player, and Barbara McMeen is the cello player. This group still exists. When I retired from the symphony, also I had to retire from the string quartet, and Tim Young actually joined the quartet. He is the executive director of the Reno Philharmonic. He plays viola, and Bruce switched back to violin. So they still play.

Do you remember performances or specific pieces?

Not pieces so much, but we performed in a number of different places. Once or twice we even went out of town. One time we went to Dayton. There is an old music hall in Dayton and we played there.

There is an office building over by the airport (it may be called Airport Plaza), that had a series of Friday concerts for a number of years sponsored by Sierra Arts. We would always try to be a part of that. If they had a six or eight-week season, we would play one of the Fridays.

We played in our homes, of course, and invited our friends. We played out at the Franktown Center for the Arts, which is out in Washoe Valley. It's a private home that has a series of concerts that is organized by this woman named Ursula. You have to be on

their mailing list. They never advertise. You get on their mailing list and then you pay twenty bucks, and they have these recitals in the living room. They are very nice. We played there a number of times.

Are a lot of small performing groups like High Noon in Reno?

There are several. Of course, the one that you probably know is Van Vinikow. He has the String Beings. The String Beings have been in existence forever. They are really commercial. They play weddings and parties. He uses different people. It is not always the same people. It is a string quartet and Van is the leader of it. He has been in the Symphony for years. I don't know if he plays in the Chamber Orchestra, but he plays in the Symphony. He has been around forever—since the early eighties. I know there are one or two other quartets, but I don't know them personally.

How close is the community of people who play for the Philharmonic and the Chamber?

There is a core of people who've known each other forever, and I think they do feel they are a community. Many of them are schoolteachers—music teachers or even other kinds of teachers. Many are at the university as well.

The new violinist Stephanie Sant'Ambrogio, who teaches now at the university, is not a member of either orchestra. That was just a choice she made. She wanted to focus her efforts on her teaching and her university work. She's great. I like Stephanie a lot. She started a noon concert series at the university that involves students. It is called L-Cubed: Look, Listen and Lunch. It is in the Knowledge Center at noon on Wednesdays. She started that and uses music students to come and play.

It's a great opportunity for them to perform, and sometimes I go and listen.

You had told me that you had started at the library at UNR in 1979 to work on the computer-based cataloging system. Can you tell me a little bit more about computers at that time and what it was like working with technology at that time?

Well, I can, but I don't think you have enough time. Technology was just getting started in libraries. We were using something that was called a mini computer. You don't even hear that word anymore. We were using a system based on a DEC PDP-10, which had about the power of your fingernail. Compared to what we can do today, it was nothing. They had to use a very basic level of coding to build systems that would run on those mini computers.

I was very, very lucky. I was working at the Portland public library... the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon, when they purchased one of the first ten mini computer-based library circulation systems that was ever sold in this country from a company called CLSI. It is an acronym. They put out an announcement in-house for someone to take the job of running that system. I ran upstairs to the director's office and put my name on the list to be hired for that position and I got it; I was hired. I was only a regular librarian for about a year and a half. I then became a systems librarian.

I was at the Multnomah County Library for about four years, and during that time I ran this system and we converted all their materials. That is how I became involved. You have to remember that there were no personal computers. That was before the IBM PC or any of those kinds of computer, and before Radio Shack. All we had were computer

terminals that were connected—hardwired—to this mini computer based system. It was a completely different type of operation than anything you would see today.

When I came to UNR, they had purchased the same CLSI system jointly with the county library. They were going to run it jointly and it was all quite a good idea, but they hadn't managed to really get anywhere. They didn't have anyone whose sole focus was to make this thing work, and that was what I was hired to do. I was hired to get the materials converted into machine-readable format so that they could put it in the system and train the people to use the system. Then we went from there.

Looking at the beginning of computers at the university to what we do now with information technology is sort of unbelievable. In those thirty years... I loved being part of that. I was involved with the first networks that were installed at the university, with the first web... with the first everything that was in computers at the university.

Were other departments or colleges outside of the library using computers at that time?

There were some. There was a Computer Users Advisory Board. There wasn't an information technology department at the university. Information technology was run out of the System Office (System Computing Services). The IBM mainframes that ran the accounting systems, registration, and all those things were all run at the Computer Center, which was part of the Chancellor's Office. It was not part of UNR. UNR didn't have a computer staff. They had a guy who was appointed head of computers... I don't even remember the title, but he tried to coordinate things starting in the early 1980s. They didn't ever have equipment, really, or anything. It was an odd situation.

The library, by virtue of having some money and some expertise, was always a leader in what was going on on campus in terms of information technology (at least at first). Then, of course, the whole thing caught up with us. At one point UNR actually got our own computer department and Information Technology Division under Steve Zink, and all this took off. That was quite a bit later on, though.

The library bought among the very first... there was a computer called an Osborne. That was what they called the first portable computer. You could actually pick it up.

Could you actually pick it up, though?

You could, but it was heavy. It was twenty to twenty-five pounds. That was the very first portable computer. I bought four of those for the library and we stopped using keypunch machines. We started inputting all of our acquisitions data, and book orders into these Osbornes. We did a number of quite unusual and interesting things over the years just to make things work better in the library and to be more efficient. We did computer information searches from the time that BRS Search became available. Dialog—the old system that you used to hear about that did bibliographic searches—we had all those things. They ran on what looked like teletype machines, because there were no PCs.

So you were involved in more of the technological end?

Yes, all the way through my career. When I became project director for the Knowledge Center building project, I still was the systems librarian. At that point the Dean had pretty much dismantled the Systems Office and put those people into Information Technology.

For many years I had my own people. I had my own staff of seven, who ran all the computers and computer operations in the libraries. That was changed organizationally to be part of IT, but I was still the one who was trying to direct what happened in the library and determine what we needed. At the same time I was project director for the Knowledge Center.

I became senior director of libraries for the last few years that I was there, so I was managerially in charge of the whole operation of the library. The other directors reported to me—director of research and director of... there were five or so who reported to me.

You mentioned Steve Zink.

Steve Zink is the Vice President for Information Technology and he has the title Dean of Libraries. So, he always represented the libraries in the Provost's Office and for that high-level stuff. The senior director, which was my title (and there is still a senior director), operationally runs the library.

Can you tell me about Getchell Library?

Oh, my goodness. Getchell Library was built in two phases. The second phase, I want to say, was in the 1970s. The first phase was maybe in the 1960s, and the second in the 1970s. It was built in two phases, and so it is a very odd building. Over the years, the needs of the libraries changed so much, that they did all kinds of weird things to the building. They built interior walls that weren't meant to be there, and it was just a horrible thing to try to wire it for technology. The rats' nest of cables that developed in the ceilings—it was frightening.

We did what we had to do to wire up the hundreds of computer terminals that eventually were installed in that building, to

put the networks in, and to put the wireless in. The building really didn't stand up to it, and the heating and cooling systems never worked well. It was partly our own fault because the building had all these extra walls. It just wasn't meant to work that way.

In many respects the building did work, though. The public areas were very well attended. Mostly, though, it was a social gathering place for the university. We were always pretty busy and the gate counts were high, but I wouldn't say there was an awful lot of scholarship going on much of the time.

One of the worst features of the building were the book stacks. The book stacks were in the basement levels. None of the levels matched up with the actual levels of the building itself, and the book stacks were actually structurally not even part of the building. They were metal. They were built on top of each other, so that when you were walking in the stacks, you were walking on clanging metal floors, essentially. To this day it is scary to think if you were down there in an earthquake....

Of course, we ran out of space a long time ago. The assessment that we needed a new building was done in about 1989 or 1990, when they determined that Getchell just couldn't be made to function ever, additions or no additions. There really needed to be a new building. That decision was made, and by many miracles along the way, we finally got the Knowledge Center.

So this assessment had been done around 1990 that said Getchell wasn't going to stand up.

Right. A feasibility study was done by a consulting firm to determine was it feasible to expand and renovate Getchell. It was not.

What year did the Knowledge Center open?

2008.

What were other challenges of the building?

Well, we made it work. We moved things around a lot and changed functionally. We developed a precursor to the @One computing floor that we have in the Knowledge Center. We had that in Getchell down in the lower level. It wasn't pretty, but it functioned. We were able to function in Getchell.

We had to store a lot of the books in a remote storage facility out in Stead, and that's very inconvenient for us and for the users. We were already starting to see a huge percentage of the use is electronic anyway, so the physical volumes are much less important than they used to be.

How did Getchell fill the role as a cultural center if at all?

Looking back on Getchell, there wasn't an auditorium at all, but we had a film room. There were a lot of films shown in that room that were part of a film series, and many were open to the public. Many were also film classes that came and watched in that room in Getchell, but I don't think it seated more than fifty or sixty. So film was part of it.

There wasn't much programming because there was no venue. I think the strongest cultural tie, is that the collection is open to the public... in order to check out books people from the community pay a fee for a one-year borrower card. It was a rather small fee. The public has always been welcome to come in and use the collection. That is a huge resource for the community.

The Special Collections department and the archives are both very important as cultural resources for the community. We are able to feature Special Collections much more

prominently in the Knowledge Center than it was in Getchell. It was up on the second floor and very crowded. The public part of it was very small and they were only able to put in one tiny area of exhibits. Those exhibits were of interest, but they were just so small that they never amounted to a very important resource.

Over all those years, of course, Special Collections collected things and they collected art. They collected a lot of art. One of the missions for the new building was to be able to feature that art so people could see it, and also to mount exhibits on a regular basis of all the very interesting things that are in those collections.

The exhibits that are done in the Knowledge Center... there usually are about three a year. Right now there is an exhibit about horses that is interesting. They did a nice film showing of *The Misfits*. That was so well attended they had to put part of the audience in other rooms. In Getchell we did occasionally have exhibits that might be just on freestanding boards. Also we were able to feature student work. We had two walls in Getchell that were contiguous with the main lobby area, and we had student artwork there. We don't do that in the Knowledge Center, but that was a part of what Getchell was able to do.

How did you vet student work for Getchell Library?

Well, all I know is that Bob Blesse did it. Bob was our special collections librarian. He worked with the art department and together they found the student work and put up the shows.

Were there any guiding principles for what you wanted to have in the Knowledge Center in terms of exhibit space?

Yes, we spent quite a bit of time making certain that essentially the whole building is an art venue. All floors have art, and all of the floors have exhibit areas. Sometimes they are at the end of a corridor. Sometimes it is a whole space that is devoted to exhibits. There are art walls all the way up from the second through fifth floors facing the atrium. They are full of art that comes from Special Collections. A great deal of time and effort was spent in both making the space suitable and then continuously keeping those works of art safe, well-displayed, and labeled. A lot of time and effort, yes.

In terms of what's displayed there now, is it primarily items from special collections?

Right now I think it all is, yes. The horse exhibit, as far as I know, all came from Special Collections. The works that are on the walls flanking the atrium are usually from Special Collections, as are other things in the exhibit cubicles.

Where did the decorative chairs come from that are under the stairs?

During the fundraising for the new Knowledge Center these chairs were found in some room at the university. They were old wooden classroom chairs that somebody had saved because they are cool. Michele Basta and probably other people (I think of it primarily as Michele's accomplishment, though), came up with the idea of giving these out to artists all throughout the town and having them do whatever they wanted to make each of these chairs into a work of art. Then they had an auction. They had an event where they auctioned off the chairs. They kept eight or ten of them, and that's what you see in that exhibit space underneath the main staircase—the ones they decided

to keep. I didn't realize they were going to be there forever. There is an Art Committee, and Michele's the chair of it. It is a community group that helps determine policy for art. They decided to keep the chairs there for a while longer. So that's where those came from.

Is the Art Committee associated with the Knowledge Center?

Yes, it is the Knowledge Center Art Committee. It is an art advisory committee and they helped come up with policy for would be displayed in the building. That policy, boiled down in a nutshell, is that primarily we want to feature the materials that the libraries own and the works that are in Special Collections. Not that we don't ever include other materials—we do—but it is primarily meant to feature our own collections.

What kind of promotion or marketing did the library engage in to involve people in the library and the programs?

Well, much more of that was done after we built the Knowledge Center. There wasn't much to promote with Getchell. We had a website that we worked very hard on to try to bring the resources to the people who needed them. The library still does that, of course, but in terms of promoting programming, that was something we learned when we moved.

I got very involved with that, along with a couple of other people, because we didn't have anyone whose job was marketing. We learned to make postcards and send them out to our mailing list, to promote our different programs. We make posters and put stuff up on the web, and we go online and put in news releases and announcements. We basically learned to do that after we moved. We are

attracting, and they still are, pretty good groups to the events that take place.

There usually is an event related to each new exhibit, and sometimes more than one. They have a speaker event called Small Talk that we started a couple of years ago, that features faculty talking in an informal environment about their work and books they have written.

What was the importance of including galleries and being mindful to having exhibit space?

It was just integrally considered to be very high priority for this building by the people who started the whole concept of the new building. I wasn't really involved until the discussion had been going for a while. They had done all the major fundraising. I was more involved with the library's computers and technology up until that point. It was considered to be really important because it is so important to be in a beautiful space, and why not be beautiful if you are building a new space? Why not be aesthetically pleasing and lovely? It doesn't cost that much more than being ugly. Also because it is a community resource, it was felt that a culturally rich space would be of much more interest to the community than some boring building that didn't really have much to offer aesthetically. The Knowledge Center was meant to be a work of art in and of itself, and then have places to display art in it. We think it turned out that way.

Is it part of the Art Advisory Committee to decide what they are going to exhibit?

No. The Special Collections staff does that—Donnie Curtis, Jackie Sundstrand, and Betty Glass. They are the ones who choose the art and mount the exhibits. They have had some help. When we first opened, we hired

a young woman who worked part-time. She was in the Art Curator Program in the Art Department and she helped us set up all the original... the first time we did exhibits and hung all that art, we had professional help to do that. There is a lot involved in making things secure, using secure hanging devices, and all that kind of thing.

Of course, there's a great deal of concern about environmental settings. We worried about what the environment would be for the things that are in the exhibit cases. For example, we had to have all the lighting in the exhibit nooks redone. It turned out when they originally did it, it was too hot. The lights that were selected by the lighting design person weren't right, and all the exhibit nooks or cases were rewired with lower-heat fixtures. There is a lot of concern. These rare materials have to be in certain temperatures.

What was that experience like, being a part of creating what is now the Knowledge Center?

Well, it was the best thing I ever did. It was all-consuming for about ten years. We spent a number of years designing that building. The reason that it was so long was partly because the funding kept coming and going. We did one complete design and then the funding got put on the back burner. We had about a year off, and then all of a sudden we were back on. We were able to look back at what we had done and then make it much better.

One of the reasons why that building worked so well is because there were many years of planning and thought and the involvement of all of our staff. We had worksheets that every department filled out of all the things they needed and what kind of functions they were trying to accommodate. Departments met individually with the architects. I was always there, but we worked

very closely with the architects. We had some very fine architects who really understood what we were trying to do.

It is hard to even quantify, but it was a number of years before the final plans were actually signed off on and went out to bid. It really worked, though. In that lengthy time that we had, we were able to define what we wanted.

What was the process of getting the books from Getchell to the Knowledge Center?

Oh, huge. Good question. All of these details about the move took a lot of planning and a lot of doing. Since I was full-time on that, it was all I worried about for a long time. We were able to do it.

We hired a moving firm who came in over a period of a month. They brought their big trucks and their big strong guys. What made it particularly challenging was that we took the collection from Getchell and had to move it into two different places. Part of the collection went in the open stacks and part of it went in the automated retrieval system. So, we had to mark the books.

First we had to get them all converted into the machine-readable form—not all of them were. For about six years prior to the move, the catalog department finished up every single volume everywhere and made sure it was in the computer. Then we went through with lists and marked with dots which books went in the stacks and which books went in the retrieval system, so when they were moved, they could be put in the right place.

The moving company brought the books in and put them on the open shelves, and that worked pretty well. It turned out there were a lot more books on the third floor than the fifth, because they overestimated the density that they had to shelve at, but that can be adjusted over time.

Then books had to be moved into the retrieval system area only as fast as they could be loaded. There was a lot of staging that had to be done and we had to have people loading those books on a continuous basis for a long time. I think the total loading part took several months. I don't recall, but they loaded for quite a while. It was a huge challenge. It worked, though.

What was the relationship between UNR and the general community in terms of cultural activities?

It has always been my sense that the university pretty much sets the agenda for itself, which for the most part is appropriate. I know that there are community advisory boards for many parts of the university but not for the library. The library pretty much decides what it is going to do to present programming and show its work, and tries very hard to be aware of and involve the community.

Especially with the Knowledge Center, it has been a very high priority to bring community people in to see what is going on, to make them feel better about the whole idea of the university, and to come to the Knowledge Center. Certainly many people have come to the Knowledge Center in one way or another.

The Knowledge Center is a venue for a lot of different events. Many of them have nothing to do with the library itself. Groups like to use the Knowledge Center for their programs and things. Mostly it's university groups, but once in a while it is approved to do a community event, like hosting a business group. Not on a regular basis, though, because the Knowledge Center is too popular with the university community.

Is there any interaction between the university and the community?

The Art Advisory Board is a community group, and they were quite active during the formative year of the Knowledge Center. Mostly, though, the library puts on and invites the community. Hopefully some of the community comes, and some of them do. There is a Library Friends group. That's a community group, but they don't set policy. They are a support group and they put on some events. They organize the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame. That is an event that attracts a lot of people from the community on an annual basis. The event honors the people who win the writing awards.

What big changes have you seen in Reno culturally over the years that you've been here?

I think the biggest thing I've seen is the maturing of the orchestras. They have both just gotten better and better and attracted a lot of support from the community. Both are financially doing okay, as I understand. That is just remarkable to me—even in this economy they have been doing well and attracting large audiences.

It also amazes me how many art shops there are. You can go down to the Art Walk along the river, or you go downtown and you will find all kinds of artists' shops and places selling art. That has all grown up in the last fifteen years. As far as I know, there was hardly anything like that when I came here.

The Opera used to be stronger. They have struggled, I think, the most of the three main music organizations. Opera is so expensive to produce. I know they're still doing some performances, but they were stronger in those early years.

NANCY PODEWILS

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Nancy Podewils: I was born in New York City and grew up in West Orange, New Jersey. I lived there until I went to college, which was at Cornell University. After that, I went to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where I met my husband and we subsequently moved west.

Can you tell me about your parents?

I was the older of two children born to Peg and Harold Seelig. My mother had a degree from Goucher but never worked outside of the home except for volunteer work. My father was a pencil salesman for Eagle Pencil Company and commuted to New York City daily. They were married for over fifty years and argued, but basically had a good marriage and were very much loving parents.

Can you tell me about the elementary, middle, and high schools you went to?

I went to Fairmount Elementary School, and I went to West Orange High School in West Orange, New Jersey. I was in chorus, but it was kind of the secondary chorus. I was involved in a couple of theatrical productions during high school. They weren't major roles, but I've always loved theater.

Growing up, beyond what you were doing in school, do you remember any cultural activities you were exposed to or that your family was involved with?

My parents always took us to live theater. There was a live community theater, Paper Mill Playhouse, nearby. We went to many shows there. We went into New York City for shows. We went to art museums. I took ballet and tap dance lessons. I took piano lessons; I wasn't very good at it, but I took those lessons. There were lots of opportunities for visual art and performance art exposure as a member of the audience. My first live play was *Peter Pan* when I was six. It was magical.

You mentioned your husband and you coming to Reno. When did you come and what brought you here?

I met my husband in Philadelphia when we were both in graduate school, and he got a position as an instructor at the University of Arizona. We moved to Tucson, Arizona in 1970 and were there for eight years before we moved to Phoenix in 1978, following a job opportunity for him. We then moved to Reno in 1986, again following a job opportunity he was offered.

What cultural activities were you involved in while you were in Arizona?

I was only involved as an audience member. We went to theater and concerts on a regular basis. I didn't think about acting. I had done some acting in college as well as in high school, but was busy with my career and with raising my daughter and doing things as a family.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first came here?

Well, we never planned to move to Reno. Before coming, we thought, "Okay, gambling, not something we're interested in." My husband got a wonderful job offer from St. Mary's, though, and we thought it was too good to not fully explore. Our daughter was also at the point of entering high school and was getting in with some not-so-wonderful people in Phoenix. We figured this would be a good time to break those associations for her.

So, we moved up here. We loved Lake Tahoe. We have always loved the mountains. I loved the blue skies, which are very different from out back East. You could see huge vistas

versus more buildings. So we came here figuring I could probably get a job somewhere as a social worker, and he had this great opportunity with St. Mary's.

Was there anything about Reno that surprised you once you came here?

I think gambling was less central for most people than we had thought. A lot of people were interested in being outdoors. At that point, the cultural scene was not huge, although we did go to plays put on by Reno Little Theater and we did go to some concerts. I think the main thing that impressed me was that, for a small town that was easy to navigate and get from one end to another, there were quite a few amenities both in terms of stores and culture.

Can you tell me about your career as a social worker and places that you've worked?

Well, I started out thinking I was going to teach high school math, and then math got very difficult. I started taking some classes that I just fell in love with in psychology and sociology, and was doing some camp work that allowed me to have a lot more intimate interactions with people. I remember an abnormal-psych teacher saying, "Well, maybe you should consider social work."

I said, "What's that?" because in West Orange, New Jersey, I was not familiar with social work. I went to the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Social Work, though, and loved the community mental health field.

During my schooling, I initially worked on an internship at Children's Bureau of Delaware. That involved working with foster kids, working with potential foster homes, and working with unwed mothers who wanted to place their children. I really enjoyed

that. Then, I worked for Tucson Community Mental Health Center after we moved to Arizona.

My first job in Arizona was actually at a center for mentally retarded people, which worked to integrate them into the community. There was an institution that many of them had been living in for years and years, so we were looking for ways to help them become more normalized. I was head of social services for this new program called Arizona Training Program at Tucson. I recruited a number of staff members, helped develop group homes and foster homes, and worked with some of the individuals who were in the community coming in for day services. I also helped people get placed in homes.

When my husband got a job offer in Phoenix, I began working at Arizona Health Plan, which was an HMO, working in their addictions program. I had not worked in addictions before, but it was very similar to mental health, and I was able to learn some of the extra issues people with addictions dealt with. I was a therapist for people with addictions and other mental health problems.

When we moved here, I got a job at a hospital, at Washoe Med, in their LifeSkills program. I had never worked in an inpatient program before, but I was the inpatient clinical coordinator, overseeing the nursing staff and helping to develop a variety of inpatient and transitional services.

I subsequently became their first outpatient therapist and then shared the roles of department manager and outpatient therapist as they were developing more outpatient-based services. I have been an outpatient therapist with them since then, initially full-time; then, the last couple of years have been on a per-diem, one-day-a-week basis. At this point, I'm seeing individuals and families with behavioral health problems,

many of whom are on Medicare, because I am Medicare-certified.

I want to ask you about Sierra Watercolor Society, but I asked about your career in part because I suspect it has lead to some of the things that you've become involved with in terms of arts and culture.

Actually, I had not done much painting until recently. I always loved watercolor and took my first class in 1999—just kind of a daylong class. I'd been hearing about Sierra Watercolor Society from a couple of colleagues and teachers, but I had conflicts with the meeting times. When those conflicts subsided around 2005, I started going to meetings regularly and then became involved with a program that was taking watercolor to the elementary schools, called Art Angels. The Watercolor Society itself started in 1989, but Art Angels started in 1999, to fill some of the gap in art services in the elementary schools.

My main painting was inspired by my desire to put together a self-help book for patients, and I did that in 2004. It's called *A Roadmap: Guidelines for Getting Where You Want To Go*. It's been so long since I've even looked at it, but essentially, it deals with a lot of different issues that people struggle with: anxiety, depression, anger, addiction, self-esteem, relationships. I wanted to illustrate this book, and so I took some special classes to be able to paint people as well as some of the landscapes. I then made that book available at a very limited cost because I self-published it through Kinko's. I have illustrations in that book that were a stretch for me, but I really wanted to have the book speak on several levels.

I continue to do some painting, but I do more facilitating this instruction program that goes into the schools.

What kind of approach does Art Angels take in terms of teaching art to kids?

When I first became involved with it, I was following the lead of the originators of the program, Jean Braden and Alice Williams. They basically just wanted to give kids a chance to discover how joyful it could be to paint with watercolors. There was a little bit of instruction about how to make colors lighter or darker, how to mix colors, and how to either have colors stay exactly where you had placed them or move together, but there wasn't a lot of formal instruction.

I also became involved with the Nevada Arts Council grants process, starting in 2008. I took a workshop on that and had done some grant writing for Reno Little Theater. I came to realize that Sierra Watercolor programs—especially Art Angels—might be appropriate for grant funding as well. I thought it would be really helpful to expand the instruction to tie the watercolor experience to some of the academic standards and learning objectives in the classroom, like telling a story or looking at proportions and balance and relationships.

I developed a model whereby we would essentially have two parts. One would be to help students understand how colors mix together and how joyful and playful it can be without working very hard. So we did a wet-into-wet experience, where you put water on the paper and then drop in colors and see what happens with the colors just mixing on their own.

The second part of the model allowed them to understand more about composition—how to create a sense of distance, how to create balance, how to create focal point, and what mood they want to convey in their painting. They would get a larger piece of watercolor paper, could draw very lightly if they wanted

to, and then create a painting that would tell a story. We'd also put a mat around it so it would be ready to frame.

The instruction became a little bit more focused, but they could still paint whatever they wanted, which most of the kids really appreciated. The teachers have given me feedback that it's wonderful to see some of the more challenged students, in terms of academic progress, being able to hold their own and feel successful doing something in the classroom.

What was the impetus for starting Art Angels?

It was primarily to fill some of the voids in the elementary art programs. Even at that point, when funding was a little bit better than it has been recently, art programs were being cut to make more room for the academic subjects that would be tested in order to measure a school's progress. Some of the creative outlets for kids were being curtailed, especially in the resource-poor schools. Some have great PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] support and have great parent experience with art, but many schools don't have that luxury. So, [the goal is] to try to go to the less-advantaged schools and provide a one-time experience for a couple of hours to give them some excitement and inspiration to keep expressing themselves in a nonverbal way.

How did you get involved in Art Angels and take on its management?

I've always had a love for kids. In fact, at one point, I thought I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, but then developed other interests. I just really thought it was an important program, and so I began assisting as my schedule permitted. Then, when the two founders, Jean initially and then Alice, became

challenged with health issues, I offered to step in to Jean's role of doing scheduling with the schools and outreach. The Sierra Watercolor Society Board approved of my taking over that role, which means, not only do I do primary instruction, but I also make sure we've got all the supplies, that all the paint palettes are in appealing condition, and that we have enough of everything, including volunteers, that we need to go to the school and have a successful experience.

I've really enjoyed working with the teachers and the schools. We got a grant to try a pilot project, which was a more extensive instruction model, out at Nancy Gomes Elementary, which is way out in Cold Springs and so underserved in many ways. For the most part, that was very successful. We've since tried that at other schools and, again, have gotten feedback that the kids really benefited from the greater instruction as well as the fun.

If we have time, we do a critique at the end of the experience where the children would share their painting, tell what the story was behind the painting, and maybe get some feedback from their peers about the elements that were really very strong in the painting: "I love your use of color," or "You really incorporated balance well in that painting."

How many classes and how often is Art Angels able to teach?

At this point, during the school year, which is basically from September through June, we do two classes each month. The classes are scheduled based on teachers calling and saying, "I'd like to schedule." We see what openings there are that would fit with the teachers' schedules. There have been requests for us to come more often, but everything is on a volunteer basis with the Watercolor

Society, and getting enough volunteers to be able to provide the individualized assistance at each of the classes has been challenging. We want to have about four helpers as well as the one or two instructors. We'd love to be able to have two different teams that could go out or to be able to expand during the summer, and hopefully we can do that at some point.

We also do two, occasionally three, community workshops where fifty children from throughout the area come and paint for a couple of hours. There are seven tables, so each instructor has seven to eight children, which is a very manageable size. Again, there's a little bit of instruction and then the students have an opportunity to paint and to have their painting matted.

How many active volunteers do you currently have?

"Active" varies. Some are there every single time if I want them, but I'd say about fifteen.

Are these exclusively members of Sierra Watercolor Society?

Most of them are. Occasionally, a friend of one of the volunteers will come and assist. I had a friend help at the last community workshop because we were a little short on volunteers, and she basically changed water, helped with blow-drying paintings, and helped with wiping the paint palettes down again. There are some things that are pretty easy for anyone to step in and do. They don't have to be artists. There are art questions, though, and there are always artists around that can say, "I won't draw or paint it for you, but this is how you might do it," and they'll demonstrate on a little piece of paper the particular issue that the student wants to undertake.

How receptive have the school districts been to having these classes at the elementary school?

For the most part, the teachers and principals have been very enthusiastic. Occasionally, there are issues about testing and everything they're trying to cram into the curriculum and it's been difficult to carve out the time sometimes. The teachers that have had us have been very enthusiastic about having us back, though. "When can I schedule for next year? How do I do that?"

At the community event this year on July 22nd at the Wilbur D. May Museum as part of Artown, I had a couple of parents talk to me, and I've had their teachers subsequently call and schedule classroom visits. They haven't had us come out to their classroom before, but they're very excited about the possibility of offering some quality art experience and fun.

How do students respond to the instruction?

Occasionally, we have very perfectionistic students or students that say, "I can't do that," and we encourage them to maybe take on a little bit less of an ambitious subject than they initially picked, because we have a variety of books and pictures to use as reference. They've been very excited to discover that, yes, they can do things. Most of them have been very pleased with their productions. With the wet-into-wet experience we do first, there's no way of doing that perfectly or imperfectly. You just have fun and the kids are so focused. In fact, I had the idea it might be interesting to do that experience before a major test, so that maybe they could be less tense when it came time for the test, as it allows them to loosen up and also keeps them very focused.

I had a comment from one of the parents from the community event. I called her for

feedback, and she said, "The kids were so pleased with what they did. They took the paintings home immediately. They are now framed and on the wall. They are so proud of it and their parents are so proud." Mostly the children are really happy with the art experience. They don't always like getting up in front of the class and talking about their story. They like feedback, but some of them are a little shy and they don't know how to describe the story they want to convey. It's been mostly very positive, though.

We get letters from a lot of the students, saying, "I'm going to be an artist when I grow up. I can do that, and thank you so much for coming and volunteering your time to be with us and bringing some really neat supplies." They are happy with the paints. They are happy with the instruction. Some of the teachers have just been so appreciative of the amount of individualized attention we were able to give them.

Can you tell me about the volunteers with Art Angels?

Some of them are primarily professional artists. They have sold a lot of paintings. They teach; they are not only doing their own work, but are willing to share that with others. There are people that work in a variety of jobs—tech jobs and social-work-type jobs. Some are retired; many are not. Some are semi-retired. There's a wide range of areas that they come from geographically as well as professionally, but all of them love to paint. Some of them are fairly new artists and some of them are much more seasoned artists.

Alice Williams, with whom I collaborated and from whom I've taken over the primary instruction role, has been painting since she was a child and has sold many paintings and won awards. Jean Braden has also done

painting for most of her life. They're less active right now because of health issues. I've been very fortunate with the quality and enthusiasm of the art volunteers.

Do you find that you have to recruit people, or do people offer?

It's a little bit of both. We have a newsletter that comes out monthly, and I have a listing of the classes that are coming up which states what needs there are and asks people to please call me if they're able to volunteer. We also circulate a sign-up sheet at the meetings, which we have every-other-month. For the most part, the volunteer slots get filled. There are times that some will say, "Call me if you need something. I'm not going to sign up at this point, but let me know if it's needed." It hasn't been too difficult, but certain times can be more labor-intensive than other times.

What sources of funding do you currently have for the program?

Up until a couple of years ago, it was all paid for by donations and membership dues. Membership dues are currently \$30 a year, but people can still come to the meetings even if they don't pay dues and don't become a member. We were getting donations of art to be raffled off. We also have a Balloon Races exhibit, at which paintings are donated and sold via a silent auction, and the proceeds go to Art Angels. We are a 501(c)(3), so if somebody donates supplies or artwork to us, they can write it off as a tax deduction. Those have been our primary sources of funding.

Then, we got a quarterly grant last fall [2010] for the September through December quarter to be able to do this project at Nancy Gomes. We also applied for a Development grant and an Arts Education Component

grant through the Nevada Arts Council. We additionally applied for a project grant through the City of Reno to help with the cost of supplies, because supplies are going up in price. A mat is three dollars each at Nevada Fine Arts. I was getting those through an online supplier, but it was very hard to count on the supplies arriving in a timely manner, and it was making me a little crazy. We like to support local art groups, but the supplies do cost something, and we have to get new brushes sometimes, or get replacement paints for the paint palettes, or get new paint palettes because the others are pretty trashed. So, at this point, the funding is a combination of grants, which have to be matched, and then donations and dues from the watercolor members.

Are the supplies your main expenses?

Those are the main expenses. Also, with the grant, we are able to offer some mileage reimbursement to the volunteers that were coming from some distance. A couple of people accepted that offer. Many people said, "No, just leave it with Art Angels. I'm more than happy to donate my gas mileage and time."

Besides the auctions and the community-wide classes, are there any other special events for Art Angels?

There are exhibits through the Watercolor Society in several places during the year. The Wilbur D. May Museum, Reno South Meadows, and the downtown library have been the primary places for exhibiting our work in the last few years. In terms of Art Angels, there have been no other events except for these community workshops and the auction and/or raffle at the Balloon Races.

What do you feel is the importance of having arts programs in the schools?

It is so important. It's using a different part of the brain. It's using a different means of self-expression. It's allowing students who are somewhat academically-challenged to have a sense of success and self-worth. It helps people see things from a different perspective. Some people try to absolutely copy or replicate a picture, but some of the most successful pictures, they discover, are more impressionistic. They can create something wonderful, even by just playing with the color.

I don't have the research stats with me, but they're quite available, that show the people who do art in various forms are more successful academically, but even more importantly, they have a different kind of engagement with school. If some people are very discouraged about the whole school environment, they're more likely to drop out. If they have something that is successful, even if it's not in math, then they are more likely to stay involved. Whether it's with music, dance, theater, or visual arts, [it's important] to have something that the school provides that keeps them engaged.

How has the Art Angels program changed or grown since you've been involved?

I think the main change is that it's becoming a little bit more intentional with the instruction. We're trying to go to underserved schools. I realized that a lot of the schools we've been going to are not in Reno; they are in the outlying areas, because I really wanted to hit the underserved schools. But there are a lot of Title I schools and schools that are borderline impoverished that are within the city limits, so the City of Reno grant is specifically to increase the balance of schools that [we go to] in Reno.

We used to go to basically any school that would call us. We're still open to that, but we won't go to ten classes at Caughlin Ranch, for example, because we know that they have resources that some of the others do not. I haven't had a call that I've turned away, but we definitely want to be intentional with our limited time, to try to have the most impact.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about Art Angels that you feel is important to include?

It's been a real joy to volunteer and to have this opportunity to coordinate and schedule the program. The letters and the drawings from the children are so heartwarming. It's really delightful to do, and the volunteers come away feeling they've gotten more than they've given.

Can you tell me what Reno Little Theater is and its history?

I've been involved with them a little bit longer and they've been around longer. Reno Little Theater is one of the oldest, longest running community theaters in the country. I Googled it and found about five or six that were older in terms of when they were founded. Reno Little Theater was founded in 1935 and has been doing five or six main-stage productions every year since then.

For much of its history, it has been a volunteer group. We've occasionally had a staff person, but most of the time, including now, it's an all-volunteer entity. We have our directors, our actors, our tech people, and our board members all volunteering their time and their passion to create live theater that has a wide appeal and a variety of genres. Every year we make sure that we do at least one drama, one comedy, one mystery, one older

play, and one new play. Of course, we have some plays that are a combination of those.

We recently started a just-off-Broadway series. We realized that there are musicals that come from Broadway to Reno, but successful non-musical plays on Broadway have not been available here. We wanted to pick one play that had recently been on Broadway that had won awards and had not been done in Reno yet, and get the rights to be able to have it here, in Reno, for our people. The first one we did was *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and we also did *A View From the Bridge* last year. This year we will be doing *August: Osage County*.

We have a play-reading process by which board members and community members read a zillion plays to try and find the best play in each genre that hasn't been done locally for many years, if at all. It also has to be well-written and have a range of actors—ideally three to twelve actors.

We have open auditions, and we really encourage new people who haven't been involved with theater at all or haven't been involved for years to come out and be part of the magic of theater. We've been very successful, not only in drawing new people to us—most of our productions lately have had a couple of veterans and a lot of newer people—but also in increasing our audience attendance. Part of that is the excitement about our new theater.

When I first came to Reno, Reno Little Theater had a theater of its own on North Sierra Street in downtown Reno. It was the old Dania Hall. They'd been performing there for over fifty years. It was a charming theater that needed some renovations, but it was a real draw. Unfortunately, we didn't own the land, and Circus Circus wanted to expand their parking capability, and somehow we agreed to sell the theater. We then purchased land between Arroyo and Pueblo just off

of Wells—an acre and a sixth of land—that had a structure where we could meet and rehearse, and a warehouse for storage but no performance space.

So, Reno Little Theater was itinerant for a number of years. We staged plays at different schools and at the Elks Lodge. Then, we decided we needed to have a place that we were consistently performing. So, we've been at [Proctor R.] Hug High School for the last several years doing some mentorship with their students, accommodating their hard seats by providing cushions, and accommodating the heat in the summer and the cold in the winter as best we could.

Not having our own schedule and not having full control over the stage has created some challenges, though. We weren't able to do some of the things we used to do, such as active Children's theater, acting classes, and showcasing of local talent, which we really wanted to get back to.

In 2007, we were encouraged to consider selling the warehouse. The warehouse was falling apart. Every time you would go in there and it had rained or snowed, there was stuff that came down from the ceiling. There were puddles and insulation that was getting everywhere. It wasn't a wonderful place. It would have taken a lot of money to renovate it into a performance space, which we didn't have. It had a beautiful footprint right on Wells, though—a large building right on Wells.

So, a realtor friend of mine did some research to discover that it really was worth a fair amount of money, and we were able to sell it and get the seed money to build our own theater. Part of the issue was, if we sold the warehouse, would we still have enough property to build a theater and to meet the requisite off-street parking requirements, and we discovered that we did.

In October of 2009, we started building our own theater on our own land on Pueblo Street which runs parallel to Vassar—just west of Wells. It's a 99-seat black-box theater with very flexible space. There's a 45-by-45-foot performance area that can be used for dinner parties or concerts as well as performances.

We'll have an artists' gallery to showcase local artists. We will eventually have an upstairs classroom and members lounge. There is a large reception area and we can do our performances in a comfortable air-conditioned or heated space. We will also have comfortable chairs, which are in my garage as we speak. The performance space could be used in a number of different configurations. We can do theater in the round. We can do normal proscenium. We can do thrust theater. We can also share the space with other groups for their receptions, performances, or meetings. We really want it to be a community space.

We've been involved with the Wells Avenue Merchants Association, and they are very excited about having a cultural hub in their midst and doing some partnerships—dinner-show packages, discounts at their store if you've been to Reno Little Theater, a discount on a theatre ticket if you have a receipt from one of the local stores, for example. There are lots of opportunities for working collaboratively.

The shell of the new theater was completed in 2010. We just have been granted a loan from Nevada State Bank to be able to finish the first phase of the theater enough to get us a Certificate of Occupancy and start performing there. We are waiting to have the money in hand. The contractor, Ed McCaffery, who is donating a lot of his time, is ready to go as soon as that's in hand, which should be anytime now. We are hoping to be in the space and able to perform this fall. It's very exciting.

I know there have been concerns that we were like the Lear Theater, which started building and then had to stop. We started building and did a little bit of work after the building was basically closed in. The exterior is all done. The walls inside are framed. The pipes are in. We just put in an elevator, which will allow people to get to the upper level, and that was partly through a grant from the City of Reno that we met on a two-for-one match.

We're very excited that the community wants this venue. Finding a venue that's available that will meet various needs is difficult. We discovered that when we found out Hug High School was going to be closed for repair and renovations during a time that we had planned two additional shows there this spring. We had to scramble to find space for those performances. We went to Laxalt Auditorium for *The Heidi Chronicles*, and then for the Artown show, *It's All Greek To Me*. We had to abbreviate the schedule and make some major changes in the set that we had planned for the shows, to accommodate the change.

We're very excited about having our own theater. Again, we're very much committed to quality shows that have a high performance and production value and that include as many people from the community as would like to be involved—onstage, backstage, front of house, as audience members, or as donors.

In the new theater, we have a number of naming opportunities. Some of them have been claimed, but, again, we're a 501(c)(3), so if somebody has something they want to donate in terms of money, services, or equipment, we're very open to that. We're very eager to move forward and resume classes and competitions and to showcase local playwrights and do some more creative things.

How did you first get involved in Reno Little Theater?

I first got involved as an audience member, because I've always loved theater. My husband was also on the board of RLT for a few years, shortly after we came to Reno, but my active involvement began in the fall of 2003. A colleague of mine who had been on the board and who was regularly performing in Reno Little Theater plays, was so excited about the work she was doing. I said to her, "Is there any play that you're aware of where there might be a part for me, anything that I might audition for?"

She said, "Actually, there is a mystery coming up that does have an older woman's part. It's Agatha Christie's *The Unexpected Guest*." So I auditioned for that and was cast, and the performance was in February of 2004. I was the mother of the murdered man, and that was great fun.

The following year, I was asked to be on the board. I'd been going to their workdays and doing whatever, including cleaning the bathrooms regularly. I joined the board in the summer of 2005 and have been involved on the board ever since.

I initially offered to help with publicity because the person in charge of publicity was overwhelmed and was also missing some important details. For instance, I would hear commercials on KUNR that said, "These dates with afternoon and evening performances," but it wasn't clear which days were evening performances and which days were afternoon performances; people were showing up at the wrong times and were not happy with us. So, I thought, "Okay, we need to pin that down." There were also ads we were paying for that weren't always published, and she wasn't on top of that. I worked with her and then ultimately assumed some leadership for the publicity and, of course, with social media, that's become much more expansive.

We've had to make some decisions as to where we really wanted to put our dollars, because we couldn't afford to be doing lots and lots of advertising. We were certainly posting on all the online calendars, but at this point the only paid advertising is on KUNR and in the Broadway Comes to Reno programs and the Chamber Orchestra programs. We found that those are pretty good bang-for-the-buck. We try to make sure that we're in all of the media calendars and that we are involved with community events so that the word gets out.

I joined the Alliance for Nevada Nonprofits as an individual so I can talk about Reno Little Theater. I'm part of the Arts Consortium, partly because my schedule is more flexible than some other RLT board members. I'm semi-retired, so I go to the Arts Consortium meetings and make sure that they're aware of what's happening with Reno Little Theater. We recently joined the Reno Chamber of Commerce and go to mixers to keep our name and our events in the forefront of people's thinking.

We have developed some wonderful relationships with various community people, from Forrest Hartman at the [*Reno*] *Gazette-Journal* to Beate Weinert, who is program coordinator for the libraries, to a number of other people. Theresa Reilly, with whom I'm having lunch, is underwriter for KUNR, so that, again, as opportunities come up or special events come up, we can be working together.

Besides yourself, how many other active volunteers and performers would you say are involved in Reno Little Theater?

If you count all the performers, people that are involved onstage and backstage, front-of-house people, the board members, people that help with committees, the

person that helps with grant writing, and the directors, I would say probably one-hundred. I know that we have several thousand on our membership list, and they are involved in different ways. Some of them may be just season ticket holders, although that's not a "just." That's an important role they play. Or, some are just interested in what we're doing and come to shows when they can.

Besides The Unexpected Guest, are there other productions that you've been involved with in terms of acting?

Yes. I was in *Scapino* in 2006. I auditioned in the fall of 2005. I hadn't planned to audition for that. At that point, my husband had gotten pretty ill, and I wasn't sure what my availability would be. The director thought it would be very funny to cast me as one of the fathers; he said that I'm the shortest person he knows, and that the tallest person he knew was going to be the other father. [He thought] it might be funny to have the two of us fighting each other. So, I was cast as Argante, an Italian father who goes around swinging his cane at everybody and yelling at people.

I met a number of people working on that production, including Andrew Mowers who now goes by the name of Wolfgang Price, who force-fed me spaghetti during the course of the show.

I was also the Queen Mother in *Becket* in 2008.

I've been involved with some other theater companies. I've been in several productions for TheatreWorks of Northern Nevada, one production of *Beyond the Dark Woods*, one production of *A Life Worth Living*, by Nicholas-Martin Kearney which was, basically, a one-shot deal to do a piece on an AIDS. We co-created it and then performed

at TMCC [Truckee Meadows Community College] in 2007.

I've been onstage a few times and I have also been offstage. The most recent production I've been involved with is one that we did this spring for TheatreWorks called *Talking With*. It's a series of eleven monologues by women—very different vantage points on women's lives—and I was cast as Scraps, a woman who really thinks she's the Patchwork Girl of Oz and would rather live in Oz than in the real world. I ended up making a costume that included a head and a bodysuit and then prancing around in this outfit with the head on and having an interaction with her husband and the Scarecrow, with whom she'd rather be married. It was great fun. We're reprising it at the end of this month.

How would you describe the quality of Reno Little Theater productions?

I think they're excellent, and increasingly so. Again, we're very intentional about the plays we pick. We make sure they are well-written, that, for the most part, they're really going to have a broad appeal, and that they will have some relevance in today's world. If it's a play that has been done many times, we want to bring something fresh to it. We choose directors carefully. We want to encourage new directors, but we ask them to work with us as assistant director first unless they've been very actively directing elsewhere in the community.

Our audiences seem to be very pleased with the production quality. We have people coming from HouseSeats who rate us quite highly with each of their surveys. I think that, compared to some of the other theater groups, we have less of a niche in terms of being edgy or doing just classics. We do a wide variety

of plays, but we are very committed to high-quality productions.

You mentioned the five to six productions a year and trying to hit all different categories. In terms of that formula, is there a time of year that you try to do a certain type of production?

Yes. If there are some that are particularly seasonal, we try to tie it to the season. *Terra Novo* was based in the Antarctic, and we didn't want to do that in the summer, so that was a winter show. We also did *Almost Maine*, where there's a lot of snow falling, in the wintertime. We know that we want to start the season with something that's going to be a big draw. This season we'll start with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which is a classic by Tennessee Williams and has a lot of people interested in auditioning.

We know that comedies and holiday theme shows do well around the holidays. Comedies tend to be a draw. We tend to intersperse them, so we don't have two heavy shows next to each other, or two primarily female shows next to each other. [We try] to have a variety, but it also somewhat depends on the director's availability.

I didn't mention that we have been doing an Artown show since 2005. We have been working with Artown. I have been the liaison person to Artown, and it's been a show that either includes children among the actors or that has a wide appeal for young children as well as for whole families. One summer, I was actually the primary author on an original take on *Hansel and Gretel*, which kind of brought things to a more contemporary level.

Every time the Play Selection Committee picks a slate of shows, the board will then give input and sometimes make modifications. We want to be sure that [the season] is the best thought-out, best quality season we can do.

Are there any considerations that you take into account for the Reno-Sparks community and the type of audiences they are?

One of the things we realize is that comedy is most popular and mystery is probably second. Plays with name recognition certainly seem to make a difference in terms of audience draw as well. We are very much looking to collaborate with the Latino community and do some bicultural or multicultural events and productions, especially as we're in the new theater and able to work with them. I think there are lots of opportunities for becoming more diverse and drawing in more people to participate that are from more divergent backgrounds.

In your opinion, how does the local community seem to embrace Reno Little Theater?

For a long time after we lost the theater on Sierra Street, people didn't realize we existed. We would do community events like gift wrapping at Barnes & Noble and people would say, "Oh, I thought you'd stopped performing when you left the theater." The publicity challenge has been increasing, but I think that, as there have been newspaper articles about us and as we've been more strategic with some of our marketing, people are realizing that, not only do we exist, but we're creating this theater and we're going to be alive and well and have a whole new incarnation that can be something that the community participates in.

How well-attended are the performances?

They're increasingly well-attended. We have had several performances in the last couple of years that have gone over a

hundred [audience members] per show. We're averaging about fifty per show, but in the last couple of years, the season ticket purchases have been increasing dramatically. Part of that is the excitement of [our upcoming] theater. A lot depends on timing. A lot depends on advertising.

One of the challenges in our community is that sometimes several theater companies have shows at the same time, and people who are in one show may or may not be able to see the show from another theater group. We're trying to be more aware of other schedules, though. We run over three weekends, and one of the things about our tickets, which is really great, is if you buy season tickets, you aren't locked into a specific date of a performance. You can go to any of the nine [performances] for each of the productions on whatever date works best for you.

Now, in the new theater, we will have to be take reservations because our space will be more limited, but we still want to have that flexibility, that easy access, and those low ticket prices so people without a lot of funds can still enjoy quality live community theater.

How much do the tickets cost?

Currently, they are \$12 for general audiences, \$10 for seniors, and \$6 for students. We've talked about probably upping it to \$15, \$12, and \$8, which is still a lot lower than a lot of other theater companies. Season ticket packages will be less per show than that.

In general, what types of people make up the Reno Little Theater audience?

We still primarily have older patrons—mid-forties and up—and part of that may be discretionary money; part of it may be longtime love of theater or appreciation for

how long Reno Little Theater has been part of the community. We are getting more young people and, of course, as we have younger people in the casts, that draws their colleagues, peers, and family. It is fairly diverse.

It is also pretty white. We do have some Asians; we do have some blacks, Hispanics, and people who are disabled. We want to be sure that we are being as accessible to the wide community as possible. We will be talking extensively with some people from minority groups about what would make Little Theater productions more appealing and more relevant to their issues and needs.

Besides the ticket sales, what are other sources of funding for Reno Little Theater?

We've had quite a few donations. The initial pot of money from the sale of the warehouse was about \$660,000. We raised about an additional \$200,000, just from donations and grants. People have donated services; people have donated cash. Ticket sales, donations, and grant funding have been our primary sources of funds, though.

I know that a lot of those expenses are going to the new theater that you're building, but what other sort of expenses do you have?

We've had some basic operations. When we've been at Hug or using Laxalt, we've had to pay rent. We have a cell phone. We have some small amount of utilities in the space that we currently have on Arroyo Street. When we are in the new theater, we will have additional utility costs. We have insurance that covers the space, of course.

We allow up to \$500 [in expenses] per production. We have to pay for royalties for the shows. We also have to pay for scripts. Sometimes, we can borrow costumes, props,

and set pieces or make costumes. It's really wonderful how the community has been willing to donate or loan us pieces that we could use in productions. It's very much appreciated. There certainly will be more costs with running the new theater because we have a building that is much larger—making sure it's heated, making sure the plumbing is working, etc.

Besides being a liaison and doing publicity, are there other responsibilities that you have as a board member?

I've been on the Play Selection Committee for a number of years. I wasn't this past year, but I had been showing up at meetings for several years. Maybe it's part of publicity, but there's also just being a P.R. person whenever I'm at a community event. I will do whatever is needed, which may be pulling weeds, cleaning bathrooms, or taking people on tours. I've been doing front of house, in a position that is called Lead, which involves overseeing the box office and the concessions for all of the plays, at least one weekend for each production for the last several years. There's also raising money. Everybody on the board gives money. We are 100 percent board-supported in terms of personal donations. Those are the main things that I can think of that I do for Reno Little Theater.

The other thing which ties in with Sierra Watercolor Society and Reno Little Theater is that, by being part of the Arts Consortium and applying for Nevada Arts Council grants, I've become very involved with the people from the Nevada Arts Council who have been advocating at the legislature. I was named a Grass Tops person—grassroots leadership, basically—to go down and speak with legislators, to be on the floor, to write letters, and to encourage funding for the arts

or at least encourage minimizing cutbacks to the arts that were being proposed at the legislature. That's essentially representing all of the arts, but these two groups in particular, who have been recipients of Nevada Arts Council grants.

Can you tell me about Nevada Arts Council and the Arts Consortium?

Nevada Arts Council is a statewide organization that helps support nonprofit arts groups—individuals and organizations that are 501(c)(3). They will provide a little bit of seed money or funding to be able to get some professional training, or do some special projects, or to go to underserved communities. Almost all of the grants have to be matched, so it's not like it's "Here's some money. Go play with it." It's more, "Here's some money. If you can meet us with an equal amount of money or sometimes in-kind services, then you can use this money to do this project," and there has to be a report back to them.

They are quite viable. They operate statewide and oversee all of the nonprofit arts programs throughout the state. They are based in Carson City, but the two leaders actually live in Reno, and I've gotten to know them on a personal basis, which has been wonderful.

They go through a very strong deliberation process. There are many organizations that want funding. The pot of money has been dwindling and so they have to be very deliberate as to where the monies get allocated and they have to be sure that the programs that are being supported are creative and well thought-out.

The Arts Consortium is Reno-based, and, again, it is a number of different arts groups from throughout the area. They meet monthly

and talk about some of the advocacy issues, some of the programs that are new to Reno, what's going on in each of the organizations, and ways we can work more cooperatively together.

They laugh at me because I'm almost always bringing posters, postcards, and flyers about Reno Little Theater events or Sierra Watercolor Society events so that hopefully they can help us get the word out. There are people from the libraries, KUNR, Studio on Fourth, Bella Voce, the Opera, the Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra, the City of Reno, the Holland Project, and many other groups, and it's been wonderful to be at the table talking about issues that are of concern to all of us.

What impact has the Consortium had on the local arts scene?

I think it's more feeling like we are a team. If one organization is in need of something or struggling with something, others may be able to support that organization's events. We are developing relationships so that, as there are opportunities for collaboration and joint ventures, we can proceed with them. There's a trust that is built there.

There was a fairly large contingent that went down to the legislature on behalf of the arts which sat on the floor with legislators during Nevada Arts Day. We've been to a number of meetings and testified in front of the Reno City Council as budget considerations were on the table, to the point that we get, "Oh, you again? Yeah, we know you've got a big group."

I think the persistence and the number of people passionately concerned about the arts have made a difference in mitigating the cuts, though. Assemblywoman Debbie Smith came to one of our meetings and, when she

ended up with a little bit of discretionary spending available to her, she said she chose to put it toward the arts because of the passion and the presence of Arts Council and Arts Consortium members.

Can you tell me about the grant-writing process for Arts Council grants?

I had never done any grant writing as a social worker—I'm a clinical social worker—but I went to a workshop in 2008 to learn a little more about grant writing. It was put on by the Nevada Arts Council. Mary Vargas, who oversaw a number of their grants for many years, approached me and said, "You know, Reno Little Theater really should be applying for grants." I got more information about how we would start that process and we applied for a quarterly grant for the Artown show that following summer. Subsequently, I spearheaded a group to write a grant for the next level of funding through the Nevada Arts Council. I wrote a successful grant to get funding again with a two-for-one match for the elevator and then for an Artown show the following year.

Because there were a couple of people that were part of that process who had a lot more expertise with grant writing and who were willing to take that on, I kind of backed out of doing that further. But, in conversation with people from the Arts Council, I began to explore whether Sierra Watercolor Society would be appropriate to apply for grant funding and was told yes.

I wrote a grant to get funding from the Nevada Arts Council for the project at Nancy Gomes and then again this year for some general operations and our Art Education Outreach, which is primarily Art Angels, but also includes some of the things we do for our general membership in terms of

demonstrations by renowned artists and our video library.

I also wrote a grant application to the City of Reno for the Watercolor Society. Again, I had been at a meeting—actually an Arts Consortium meeting—and was encouraged to apply for a couple of grants with the City of Reno that I had applied for, for Reno Little Theater. Writing grants is a bit of a stretch, but it's exciting to be able to articulate the exciting passions and projects that we are looking to undertake, and we appreciate their funding.

How involved is the grant process? How long is the application?

The actual application varies. The Arts Council has gone to an online process where there are a certain number of characters allowed in response to each question. There are probably a dozen questions and you're allowed up to a thousand characters each to describe the project—why it should be funded, what kind of impact it's going to have on the community, how it's similar to or different from other programs in the area, what kind of collaboration there's going to be, what kind of support it has, how it's going to be evaluated and so on.

With the City of Reno, it's a little bit less of an extensive process, but, again, it involves being able to indicate where the funds are coming from, how they're going to be used, exactly what the project is going to target, and why it's worth funding. The City of Reno's Arts and Culture Commission and City Council hold multiple meetings to consider, not only what funds are available, but which of the applications are most worthy of supporting.

In recent years, there has been some elimination of those applicants who didn't have all of the materials in on time or who

were not given a score that was high enough to be competitive. All of those were eliminated so there was a little more money available for those that did apply, but nobody got full funding because there wasn't money there.

You mentioned the Grass Tops Program. What is that process like and what kind of preparation is required for that sort of advocacy?

Part of it is getting to know your specific legislators—becoming aware of who is on what committee that may be making some crucial decisions about either funding or the validity of particular proposals—writing to them, visiting them, sitting on the floor with them when possible, writing thank-you letters for any grants that are provided or for their time on the floor, keeping on top of specific legislation that is crucial to arts funding, encouraging their support, and becoming available if they have questions.

It's relationship-building. Tim Jones, who is the chair of the Nevada Arts Council, has been excellent in providing some specific statistics and helping with wording, because he's been at the legislature a lot and has an idea of what things are going to have an impact—really knowing the economic benefit of the arts community, because arts bring people in who will spend money at local establishments. With each large art project, we bring people from out of the area that will come for particular events and will stay at local hotels or support the community economically in other ways. It's similar to the surveys that Artown has done to justify that it really is having a very positive impact economically as well as culturally.

Going back to Reno Little Theater, is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you feel would be important to include?

We're alive and well and will have a long life. I'm hoping that we can move into some new areas again, like multicultural programming, or maybe even work with the deaf community to create some programming. We are physically very close to where the Holland Project is now housed, so we have the opportunity to do some exciting joint ventures with the youth of that program, and I think our performance space would allow them to do some things that they can't do in their current space as well.

We're open to new ideas. As a relatively technically-challenged person, I'm always appreciative of people who can expand what I know and get the word out even more than I have. There are wonderful plays out there to be done and wonderful talent to be tapped. My hope is that, if there's more support for the arts in our community, some of our best and brightest will remain here rather than going elsewhere for their career and they'll continue to help us expand this viability. As we get back into children's theater and work with some of the other groups that are doing children's theater, we can encourage the future actors and technicians to create quality performance art.

How has your experience with Nevada Arts Council informed your work with other cultural activities? Has it benefited you in any way?

Going to some of the grants panel meetings has helped me appreciate some opportunities that we haven't been exploring—the importance of collaborations, the importance of stretching to do more outreach to the schools.

One of the things that I proposed a couple of years ago at Reno Little Theater, since I had gotten to know principals and teachers at

some of the elementary schools, was to bring theater to some of those schools that weren't currently getting theater from Bruka, Sierra Arts, or TheatreWorks. There's been some reluctance to take on too much because we have the new building that we're focusing on and productions that we're focusing on, but we still have an important role to play in the community—not just encouraging people to come to us—but finding ways of reaching out to them, especially with people who are in outlying areas that may not be able realistically to come to Reno to experience live theater.

How has it been for you, working with the people at the Arts Council?

I found them very supportive. If I have questions about grants or resources, they've been so helpful in helping me learn this new territory. They do a lot with a very small staff. They've had to cut back their staff. They've lost their person who was in the cabinet of the Governor's Office. The Arts and Cultural Commission no longer has a voice at that table. They're now under the Department of Tourism, which has some opportunities but also has some challenges in that it's not a standalone organization; it got kind of split into pieces and the Arts Council is now part of this other piece. But Mike Fischer, who was the person at the table in the governor's cabinet, lost his position.

Can you describe your work as a liaison with Artown and what that experience entailed?

It started out with going to monthly meetings to talk about Artown and about the potential projects that would be held during Artown within the city limits. I started out as the liaison when we did a joint venture with

UNR's Nevada Repertory Program, doing *Godspell*. So, I would go to the meetings. I would make sure that information got on the website and into the little book of Artown, which is now the Artown magazine, and that we would have a presence during Artown. I've been the liaison person ever since 2005 [which involves] letting Artown know what we are doing, making sure all of the forms get in on time, making sure that we have the required stats, and getting audience surveys if needed.

I've developed a personal relationship with Beth Macmillan and Bryan Wildman, which has been wonderful. I actually ended up volunteering for Artown as well this year and got some totally unexpected experiences, like being the hostess backstage for Pink Martini, Doc Severinsen, and India Arie, and then ushering at the Underground Ballet performance.

Primarily, it's being aware of how to apply to have the event listed and how to take advantage of some publicity opportunities. We were able to get interviews on RKPR this year about our original show, *It's All Greek To Me*.

The one challenge for me has been that we don't audition the summer show—the Artown show—early enough to take advantage of some of the publicity and photo ops that could be publicized in the Artown media. I'm hoping we can get the auditioning early enough so that we can have much more coverage during Artown. But it has primarily meant going to meetings, giving them information, and then bringing information back to Reno Little Theater.

I've also been liaison to Artown for the Watercolor Society, because one of the community events is sponsored, in part, by Artown and their supporters. We have a Discover Watercolor community event that is in the Artown book.

Do you approach Artown or do they come to you? Do you receive sponsorships from Artown?

We don't get a sponsorship per se. A couple of their sponsors do give some funds for Discover Watercolor and a couple of other Discover the Arts programs, but Artown doesn't sponsor us other than helping to publicize our events. As long as we go to the meetings, get the paperwork in on time, do the reporting, and provide insurance for the venue where we're hosting the event, they're quite willing to continue supporting us.

If there was question about the appropriateness or the quality of the activity, then that would be a different matter, but they've gotten to where they trust that what we're doing is appropriate and of sufficient enough quality to continue supporting us, assuming we fulfill these requirements.

In terms of attendance and general reception, how does the play that you perform for Artown compare to the rest of Reno Little Theater's season? Is there a noted difference because it's related to Artown?

We get a lot more little ones coming to that. We try to schedule it early enough in the day so that it doesn't interfere with bedtimes, so the latest show that we have is at seven. The latest that we have a show [at Reno Little Theater], is at seven-thirty and it goes considerably longer, until ten p.m. or later. Most of our shows are about two and a half hours. The Artown show is an hour or less.

One year, we did [performances] at several of the libraries and a couple of community venues. The libraries were packed—overflowing to the point that there was a fire code concern. But those were completely free. During Artown, we price the tickets very low at the places where we do

charge, like at Laxalt, Hug, or the River School. Those are \$5, so we're getting a good response. Again, the audience is much younger because the show is geared to younger children, and the response has been very enthusiastic. We had ninety people for the last show at this year's Artown event, *It's All Greek To Me*.

How has Artown grown or changed since you've been involved?

I think the audiences are huge, especially for the free events that we field. I think that some of the ticketed events have been not sold out because of the economy, even though the quality is there. It's always a balancing act between showcasing local groups and bringing in well-known performers from other parts of the country. Sometimes there's resentment about these "name" people coming in and stealing the limelight, but I think there's also a great appreciation for the diversity and the quality.

Is there anything else about Artown or your involvement with it that is notable or that you would include?

It is such a positive experience. There is such a diligence about security, about providing the amenities that are needed at each of the events, about keeping people safe, and having something that's a good time. After the last show of *It's All Greek To Me*, the stage director and I went to see *Opera in Blue Jeans* because our musical director from *It's All Greek* and one of the performers in the show were going to be in the *Opera* performance. That was delightful.

Unbeknownst to me, the director pulled one on me. When I was using the restroom during intermission, she had a conversation with one of the performers who needed

somebody to play the cowbell during the *Anvil Chorus*. I was informed that she booked a gig for me, and I was called up onstage to bang the cowbell during the *Anvil Chorus*, which was very funny.

I'm always appreciative when the weather cooperates at the outdoor events, because there's a lot of uncertainty about that. Again, I've been very impressed with the quality of everything that I've attended and I hear people who are enthusiastic about going to Artown. When people that I encounter say, "Clients don't know about Artown," I say, "Here's the book. There are things going on that are wonderful and free. Check it out." It's a tremendous gift to our community.

You mentioned some of the other theater companies and productions outside of Reno Little Theater. Can you tell me more about those companies, in particular TheatreWorks or any of the other ones you've been involved with?

TheatreWorks was founded four or five years ago by Stephanie Richardson. She had been an actress and a director in other parts of the country and then moved here. It is a small group, but it has a very active board, and they do about four shows a year that are somewhat less well known. They also have a very active children's program where they have kids come to weekly classes and then put on a production.

The first show I was in for TheatreWorks was *Korczak's Children*, about a Jewish orphanage during the Holocaust. Even though I had a small role, it was a play that I absolutely wanted to be part of because it was so powerful. Shows that really have social relevance are especially appealing to me. So, I was in that.

I was also in a show called *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*, where I had

to do some singing and dancing, which is not my forte, but I got to play six different roles, from a Londoner to a bartender, to a bald Dutch woman, to a lovely Irish voice, to a sock puppet. It was just so much fun to be a part of.

I've been in their dinner theater program of *Murder Me Always*, and then in *Talking With*, in which I performed the monologue about how I'd rather live in Oz because I'm the Patchwork Girl.

Stephanie has become a dear friend. She's now using her maiden name of Smith. She continues to spearhead bringing in little-known shows that have some real meat to them. They did *Nuts* a few years ago. They've also done some other very powerful plays.

The other group, Beyond the Dark Woods, is actually Bryan Wildman's production group. There was a show that he directed called *The Whole Shebang*, and I got to be an obnoxious professor that was sarcastic and snide, which was an interesting stretch for me, but it was very flattering to have him approach me and say, "I want you in my show."

With the other one, *A Life Worth Living*, I worked with Nicholas-Martin Kearney when we were both taking drama classes, and he asked if I would be in his show. It may be that the company was Truth Seekers Productions, but I'm not sure that that's the name of it. It's not something that's been ongoing.

I've auditioned for Good Luck Macbeth. Actually, *Talking With* is being produced by them for the reprisal. So, I've gotten to know people in the different companies. I attend shows from all of the different groups. I was in a Shakespeare production a long time ago called *Stille Nacht*, about the peace truce during World War I—the time when the Germans and the Americans met together on friendly terms.

Considering the different companies that exist in Reno and the different people who make up those companies, how would you describe the theater community in Reno?

It's active and it's diverse. Again, there are some that have more specific niches. Good Luck Macbeth sees themselves as doing classics primarily. Bruka does more edgy productions. TheatreWorks does some lesser known but widely-appealing productions as well as children's theater. They do more children's theater than the other groups, although Bruka does some. Reno Little Theater, I think, has the broadest base with the widest appeal. We are a community-oriented group and do productions that have that wide reach.

You mentioned that when you came to Reno in 1986, there didn't seem to be much going on culturally in Reno. How has that changed or grown?

It may be more my awareness. There certainly are some theater groups that were here then that aren't now, and there are other theater groups that have started. The Philharmonic has been around. I went to the Philharmonic with season tickets for a few years. I think Laura Jackson is bringing a huge amount of enthusiasm and a greater range of pieces to the repertoire.

We have a couple of ballet companies. TMCC's musical theater is outstanding—really amazing. Western Nevada Community College in Carson does some great shows as well, but TMCC is really getting a name for itself in terms of quality musical productions. UNR has really diminished in terms of the range of things they do. They eliminated their children's programs. They've eliminated their summer shows. I'm hoping that they will

pull it back together again and start doing more theater, because many of their actors are students who are learning, growing, and bringing that energy to it.

I think part of it is my awareness and my getting to know the people who head up the different groups so that I can support the people that I know that are at Bruka, TheatreWorks, or Nevada Shakespeare. Nevada Shakespeare has diminished as well, with a couple of people [leaving]—Jeanmarie Simpson leaving, and Cameron Crain having responsibility for two little girls, which is a different kind of demand. They're still doing some good work, but it's less present than it was, in my perception.

The arts are always going to be growing and changing. The economy has been difficult, but I think that we're weathering it. The importance of the arts—visually and in terms of performance art—is thriving, and Artown is a big part of that.

RAMON SEELBACH

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Ramon Seelback: I was born in Chicago, Illinois. I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, before they had the big balloon rallies in Albuquerque. I had left to go back to Chicago to attend University of Chicago. I was never involved in the ballooning there because that started after I left.

Can you tell me about your parents?

Both of them are deceased now. They both lived in Albuquerque most of their adult lives, at least from the time I was three or four. My father was a machinist and my mother was a stay-at-home mom.

What do you remember of the schools that you attended as you were growing up?

Other than college, I just attended basically two schools—one elementary school and one high school there in Albuquerque.

Both of them are Catholic schools. I was not very talented music-wise or art-wise. Most of my interests laid in outdoor activities like camping. My family did a lot of camping when I was very young. My father then bought a piece of land in northern New Mexico, I think about five acres. We built a ranch house on it—a cabin—up in the mountains. It was at about 8,000 feet elevation, so we could not get in there during the wintertime. There was lots and lots of snow. We spent all our summers there after I was maybe ten or twelve years old. Sometimes we would go up for the whole summer and my dad would go back and forth to work. We did lots of outdoor activities. The deer would come right up to the front of the house.

They just didn't know any better?

We weren't a threat to them. It was very remote. The nearest road was about eight miles away. Into the cabin was just a jeep trail.

What is the landscape like in northern New Mexico?

It was wooded in areas with tall pines and sort of mountainous, with rivers running through it. We did a lot of fishing. The Narrow-Gauge Railroad ran through that area, so we would play around that and watch the train come through once a day—the Silverton and Durango Railroad.

What did you study at University of Chicago?

Primarily medicine. I'm a respiratory therapist and have been ever since I was a teenager, so I studied primarily in the medical field.

What brought you to Reno?

I went from Chicago to Stanford University and worked there for quite a while. I then worked in the Bay Area for several years. The company I was working for, which contracted respiratory therapy in rural hospitals, moved my office from San Francisco to Reno, so I moved up here with them. The job didn't work out after I moved, but my wife and I liked the area so much that we decided to stay here, and we've been here ever since. We came about thirty-five years ago.

Had you ever been to Reno before you moved here?

No, I hadn't.

What are your first impressions of Reno?

I thought nobody lives in Reno. Reno is just a place you go to to gamble and have fun, but nobody actually lives here.

What was your opinion of Reno once you had spent some time here?

Reno seemed to me to be very much like Albuquerque, where I grew up, in that it was a small town but expanding very fast. We loved the area, with the mountains close by and the desert to the east and north. We enjoyed skiing, hiking, and camping in this area. It seemed like a good place to raise kids.

How did you initially get involved with hot-air balloon racing?

We call it ballooning. I originally got involved because I went to Albuquerque to visit my parents, which I did once or twice a year. On one visit it happened to be at the same time as the balloon races in Albuquerque. Those are the largest balloon races in the world. They have up to 1,200 balloons flying at one time. So, it is ten times larger than Reno. While I was there visiting them, they said, "Why don't you go out and look at the balloon races." I did, and that was love at first sight. I knew that that was something I wanted to do. I looked into it, and I actually bought a balloon before I had my pilot's license.

Can you tell me about the balloon that you bought?

The balloon was a traditional tear shape—upside-down tear-shape balloon. It is a 1984 Raven Rally balloon, manufactured by Aerostar. Aerostar at the time was the largest balloon manufacturer in the world, and they have since gone out of business.

It's a small, almost sports-car-type balloon. It is a size seven, which means that it has 77,000 cubic feet of hot air within the envelope. There is no upward limit on the size of a balloon, but there are smaller limits. My balloon will usually carry myself

and two other adults. If it is very hot in the summertime, then we can only carry one other adult, but usually we can carry two. They have balloons that are so small they will only carry the pilot. That is maybe a size five balloon. Mine is a seven, so I can take some passengers.

I have seen a picture of a balloon that was so big that my balloon could fit inside the envelope and fly inside the envelope of the other balloon. I have seen a picture of that being done. I've also seen pictures of balloon baskets that are two stories tall and can hold twenty to thirty people. So, my little sports-car kind of balloon versus the great big ones....

What different types of balloons are there?

The biggest distinction is a regular, traditional balloon like mine versus a special-shaped balloon. The two bees that fly in Reno are a perfect example of a special-shaped balloon. They can have balloons made in almost any shape. One that pops to mind is of an elephant, another one of a castle, and another one of a motorcycle. A lot of the beverage companies will make a balloon in the shape of their beverage bottles, like a Coca-Cola bottle or a Pepsi can. Champagne companies have champagne bottles that are made into balloons and this type of thing.

We have a couple of special-shaped balloons here locally. One is the panda balloon, and another one is called Sushi, which is a brightly colored fish balloon.

Most of the balloons I've seen seem to be the teardrop shape.

It is an easy way to make a special-shaped balloon if you have the teardrop shape and add appendages to it. An example of that

would be one where they have an aircraft actually flying through a cloud. The cloud is the tear-shaped balloon, and the aircraft is the nose, the tail, and the two wings off of either side of the balloon. Those are very, very expensive balloons—the special-shaped ones. Of course, the further away you get from the teardrop shape, the more expensive they are.

It's interesting to note that when you're flying one of those balloons, they fly exactly the same as my balloon flies. They're subject to the same conditions in the air. The only difference is in landing and takeoff, where you need a lot more space, usually, for that type of balloon than you would for mine. You need a bigger field, and therefore a lot more crew.

I helped crew on the United Van Lines balloon, which is the shape of a van. There were twenty of us to put that together, versus mine, where I can get mine up with a crew of three people plus myself. And that is one of the smaller special-shaped balloons.

What is the ballooning community like?

It is not a large community, because there are only about 800 registered balloons in the United States at this time. Ballooning has gone way down in popularity in the last several years, primarily because of the increased expense, especially for insurance. You can be as involved in ballooning as you want. You can go from just a casual crew person who volunteers once a year at one of the races, all the way up to a pilot of one of the special-shaped balloons who flies every weekend at a different rally and just travels around the country.

Special-shaped balloons are typically corporate-owned and used for advertising, whereas the other balloons are usually owned by individuals, although there are exceptions

to both of those rules. An example of a corporate balloon that had the regular shape was the AT&T balloon. An example of a special-shaped balloon that is privately owned is the Sushi balloon, which is a local balloon here. They live in Incline Village, and they're special shaped but privately owned. So you can go the full gamut.

For the corporate balloons, do they also then hire someone who is responsible for piloting it and going to these events?

Right. You can make a living doing that, although you do have to travel an awful lot. You have to like getting up early in the mornings.

Is there a ballooning circuit for privately owned balloons?

There are, indeed, and you can go to an event every weekend if you like. I usually go to six events a year. I put relatively fewer hours on than a lot of the private pilots do, or privately-owned balloons. Some of them go to many more events, and some of them just fly in between events and maybe only do one or two events a year, but they do the flying on their own.

Almost all balloon pilots go ahead and get their commercial pilot's license, because you cannot charge for a balloon ride without having a commercial pilot's license. Almost all the pilots will get a commercial license so that they can take people up for hire. I take people up for hire if the opportunity presents itself, but I do it primarily for sport rather than looking to make any money on it or to meet expenses.

Can you discuss the longevity and maintenance of balloons?

The typical hot-air balloon lasts six to eight years, and they usually put on maybe 400 to 500 flights on the balloon in that six to eight years. Some balloons will last longer than that. A big factor in how long a balloon lasts is how well it's maintained and how careful the pilot is on it.

My balloon is in its twenty-eighth season of flying, which is highly unusual. I have actually flown this balloon every year during that twenty-eight years, which is very unusual. You do find some other balloons that are that old, but most of them then have been in storage for maybe ten to fifteen years, then brought back out of storage.

The balloon, by federal regulation, has to be inspected by an FAA approved repair station once a year. It has to meet certain standards or else the license for it is pulled and you can't legally fly it anymore. You can either get an annual inspection or a 100-hour flight inspection, whichever comes first. Some of the commercial pilots and some of the ride pilots put 100 flights on a balloon and have to have it inspected before the year is up.

Can you describe the licensing process?

I have a commercial license. The minimum requirement is for a private license, which is issued by the FAA. You have to take ground school, flight training, pass a written exam, and pass an actual flight test with an FAA examiner. You have to go beyond that and do the same for the commercial license—a written test and a flight test with an FAA examiner.

Then every two years for the commercial and every one year for the private license you have to be re-inspected by somebody else that has a commercial rating. Commercial rating in ballooning also includes the flight instructor rating.

You can't get a commercial pilot's license for ballooning without becoming a certified flight instructor. That is part of the licensing. You have to have that commercial person do your biannual review or annual review—in my case biannual.

There are extensive classes online that the FAA will give, and there are also safety seminars. They aren't required by the FAA, but the insurance companies require you to take a class yearly. If you don't take the classes, then your insurance premium goes up significantly. It is well worth your while to take a safety class over and above the actual safety of it.

Is the FAA primarily responsible for regulating hot-air ballooning? Are any other agencies involved?

The FAA writes the regulations and enforces them. There is the Balloon Federation of America and several local clubs, though, not local to Reno. For example, my local club is called the Pacifica Coast Aeronauts, and it's headquartered in the Bay Area. They promote safe flying and this type of thing.

The Balloon Federation of America also promotes safe flying. They put out a ballooning magazine every two months, which has lots of safety information in it as well. They have safety programs for the different types of rallies in different places. It is primarily the FAA that does the enforcement of all these things, though.

Who do you get your insurance from for ballooning?

There's only two agencies, and I get mine through the IMC [Balloon] Agency, but it is specific for hot-air balloon.

Can you describe your pre-flight preparations?

The most important thing in pre-flight is the weather. We start watching the weather up to a week before a planned flight so we know what is going on with it. We're very careful to get weather briefings. Usually the night before and the morning of the flight we'll get weather briefings.

In the case of rallies...the Reno rally will have a weatherman contracted specifically to make weather forecasts for the balloons and for the rally. The one locally who has done it for many years is Steve Brown. He comes up from Las Vegas and does this for us. That is a good thing, because he is aware of what balloons need and that kind of thing. If we just take a regular flight not in a rally, we'll call the Weather Service and get information from them. We can also get aviation weather from the internet.

We start out with weather and we check it very carefully, and we have certain minimums. I don't believe there are any regulations as to how much wind you can fly in, but typically the rallies will not take off any balloons if the wind is over 10 knots, which is a very light breeze. I know the balloonists in Texas, for example, will fly in much windier conditions than we do here in Reno. I think that is primarily because they don't have anything to run into in Texas when they land, whereas we're in a pretty tight, confined area here in Reno.

We have to watch specifically for thunderstorms because thunderstorms can cause high winds up to 100 miles away from the center of the storm, so we check the radar for storms in the entire area, versus locally here.

Then the morning of the flight, I get another weather briefing, and if the weather's looking bad, I'll cancel the flight at that point. Sometimes we'll go out to the field and I won't like the conditions at the field and will cancel

then. Usually I have a pretty good idea of what is going to happen weather-wise by the time I get there.

Once we're on the field, we have to take the balloon out of the trailer and lay it out. As we lay it out, we have certain parts that we have to put together and check. My balloon is a much older balloon, and because of that, the pre-flight checks usually take quite a little bit longer than the newer balloons. They can get them up faster. I check everything, though, including propane for propane leaks and things like that. I check the fabric and look for any inadvertent holes in the fabric.

If the hole is too big, then I can't fly. If for some unknown reason the fabric's been ripped either during put-away from the last time or inflation this time, I can't fly. There are very specific rules as to how big the hole can be before I can fly or when I have to cancel the flight. If it's too big, I have to have it repaired before the next flight. If it is just a small little hole, I can put a patch on it myself. Holes can come from people stepping on the fabric of the balloon, especially if there's a little pebble underneath the foot. That can create a little hole. Because there is increased pressure inside the envelope and increased heat, the air will try and escape out of the envelope, and that tiny little pinhole will get bigger over time. It is well worth it for us to go ahead and patch it as soon as we find it.

If I do find a pinhole, then I will...every gore on the balloon is numbered, and I can pinpoint an exact location and then before the next flight I will patch that hole. If it is just a little pinhole, then it probably won't stop my flight.

Propane leaks are very important, and as we get there, we sniff for propane leaks. We also have to teach the crew, if we have a new crew, what to do. If the crew is experienced,

then I have to at least review safety features before we take off.

If we have any passengers, then we will brief the passengers on what to do and what to expect as we fly. The lift of the balloon is based on the weight of the pilot and passengers, and if a passenger gets excited and wants to land, and jumps out of the balloon, then the balloon is likely to fly away out of control. We have to make sure that they know they can't get out of the basket until they're told to and until the balloon is stabilized, because that could be very dangerous if you were downwind of power lines. We check radios before we leave so that we know that we are in radio contact with the crew. Then we go ahead and fly away.

How do you choose a location for takeoff?

The location for takeoff is important in that you have to have permission from the landowner to use that location both in takeoff and landing. If it is a public park, then we have to get permission from the park district. That is usually no problem. People usually don't mind.

We frequently use golf courses to take off because it's an early morning event and before the golfers get there. It is nice grassy area. The owners usually enjoy that because it gives them a little notoriety that the balloon will be taking off from the golf course.

The biggest consideration after that, then, is the condition of the land. You have to make sure that there is no broken glass in the area laying out. We do usually use tarps and lay the balloon out on a tarp. However, glass can go right through a tarp, especially if somebody steps on it. We have to have plenty of room because my balloon is seven stories tall. We have to have a lot of room. Then you have to look around the area and make sure that

there are no power lines close by. If you take off and run into a power line before you can get high enough to go across it, that could be very dangerous. We have to make sure that not only the area itself is clear, but the entire area around it is relatively clear.

The tightest place I've taken off from is during the Nevada Day Parade in Carson City, where we take off from the middle of Highway 395. As that goes right through town, there are buildings on either side and power lines on either side, so we have to take off very hot. We have crew people sitting on the basket to keep it down. Then when I give the word, they jump off and the balloon just goes up fast, straight up, so we can get out of those obstructions fairly fast. It gets your attention.

How many crew members do you have, and what are their responsibilities?

I typically use four people on my crew, although I have taken the balloon off with myself and one other person, but it is a real stretch to do that. I typically use four people. I use one on the fan. We have a large fan that inflates the balloon with cold air. I have one person handling the fan so they can make sure if there is any difficulty there, they can kill it with the kill switch. When I'm ready to inflate, they can pull it out of the way of the basket coming up.

I use two people on the throat of the balloon to hold it open so that the air from the fan can fill it up with cold air. The fan I use is an 8-horsepower fan, which is off an ultralight aircraft, so it's strong enough to make something fly. It puts out an awful lot of power.

So, there is one person on the fan, two people on the throat, and then the fourth person I will have on the crown line. The

crown line is a long line that attaches to the very top of the balloon and goes out the same length as the balloon does. So in the case of my balloon, it is a little over 72 feet long. The purpose of the crown line is to keep the balloon straight. If a slight breeze from the side comes up, the balloon, when it's inflating, will roll one way or the other. Because of the physics involved, the end of the crown line can just move the opposite direction and pull it back into a straight line. The second purpose of it is when I actually put the heat to the balloon, the balloon will come up straight. If there's nobody on the crown line, it will continue that motion and fly over the other direction. By putting some tension on the crown line as it comes up, that person can keep it straight up in the air and moving around once it reaches its apex.

It usually takes about fifteen minutes for my balloon to fill with cold air, and during that time I walk around the balloon and check for holes in the fabric. My balloon has a maneuvering vent on the side which I can open up while it's still on the ground and actually walk inside the balloon as it's inflating. I try and take members of the public into the balloon then, especially kids, and show them the inside of the balloon. You can't do that with the newer balloons, but it is an exciting thing to stand inside this huge balloon as it's inflating.

Then we take off; those four people usually chase me. We use the same people to chase us who have helped with inflation. Then we just reverse the process and put it away.

Do you have a set crew that travels with you or do you rely on volunteers?

I have to rely on volunteers. Since I don't fly as much as some of the other pilots, I don't

typically have the same crew all the time. However, I do have crew members that have been with me for many, many years, and I do call on them occasionally to come out. I typically get newer crew people every time, though.

The race organizers will try to get people to volunteer for crew. In the case of Reno, they actually have training sessions for the volunteer crew. I have, indeed, helped them out with that and helped train crew before the race for other pilots. I typically don't have a problem getting crew at the Reno race because it's my home town. Lots of people know that I am a hot-air balloon pilot and they want to come out and help at the Reno race. I do have problems getting crew at other out-of-town venues, though.

I remember a time I was in northern California and the organizers provided me with crew. They brought four or five strapping young husky men to crew for me, and I thought this was great; I wasn't going to have a problem at all. At any rate, I took off and I flew, and I couldn't get in contact with them on the radio. I landed and I stayed standing straight up so that they could see where I was, but I could not get a hold of them. Finally, I got a hold of one other pilot who went back to the launch site and got a hold of the launch directors. They finally sent some people out to help me get the balloon down and packed up. We found out later that the four or five young men were all from the correctional institute in town and nobody had told me that. They all had to go back to the correction institute before they could come and pick me up. They didn't tell anybody that they were crewing for a balloon and were expected to help get me back in.

A long time ago, my chase vehicle had a stick shift, and I didn't ask whether people could drive a stick shift or not. I took off and

found out that they could not drive the stick shift; they could only drive automatic. So, arranging to have somebody drive your chase vehicle when you're in the air is much more difficult than doing it before the fact.

Another time I had asked a young man if he could drive a stick shift and he said yes, no problem at all. Then after the flight I found out he did not have a driver's license. I thought he was older than he was, but he didn't have a driver's license.

He could drive a stick shift, just not legally.

Right. The other thing that is very embarrassing for a pilot is to fly away, leaving the car keys in his pocket. [laughs] That gets to be a big hassle because then you have to land and get somebody else to come up and pick up the keys and drive them back to the launch site. [laughs] I've done that twice in the twenty-eight years of flying. One time I was quite a ways into the flight and had to have somebody else fly away. The second time, they yelled at me about the car keys just as I was taking off, so I was no more than three or four feet from the ground. I got them out of my pocket and threw it to them. As a pilot, you never live that down.

How do you navigate a hot-air balloon?

The balloon itself has no steering mechanism on it at all, so you are at the mercy of the winds. However, you can change altitude. You have very definite control over going up and down. You watch the altitude and see where the winds are taking you at that altitude. Also in balloon rallies you can look at other balloons and see which way they're heading at different altitudes. If you want to go in a particular direction, you look and see if you can find another balloon that's going in that

direction at a different altitude, and you can get up to that altitude or down to that altitude.

You can't steer it. If there is not a breeze going the way you want to go, you just don't go that way. You also can't fly back to the spot where you took off. You can in some instances, and that is the reason Albuquerque is so popular. They have what we refer to as a box, meaning that lower-level breezes in Albuquerque go south, and then you can get up to a higher-level breeze and go north and go right back over the launch site. You then drop back down to the southerly breeze and go back south and drop back into where you took off. Albuquerque almost always has a box going, but it is unusual in other areas. I've only seen a box at Reno maybe four or five times.

Is there a consistent trend to Reno winds?

I have gone every single direction out of Reno. The one thing that you can say consistently happens is early, right after dawn, you get a down-canyon breeze that will typically take you to the east as you first take off. Then as the sun gets a little higher and heats up the hills, that down-canyon will turn to up-canyon, and so you'll get a breeze going the opposite direction up the canyon.

An example is this last year at the Reno race, on Friday it went to the north, on Saturday it went to the east, and on Sunday it went to the west. So three days, three different directions. The hills around here make a huge difference. You can have a prevailing easterly, but you might go west just because of the way the hills affect the winds.

Can you describe what it is like to fly in a hot-air balloon?

Well, every other kind of flying, you have to fight the elements to get that lift. With

ballooning, you put yourself in equilibrium with the elements and you just float away. Frequently when we take off, the passengers don't even know that we have taken off. They're just amazed that we're flying, because it feels so calm and so peaceful. Once you're up in the air, it is very quiet, except when you hit the burner to put more gas into the balloon. You can hear people talking on the ground, because the sound goes up.

The balloon burner itself, when you hit the burner, it makes that same ultrasonic noise that dog whistles make. Because of that, the dogs go crazy when the balloons are around and they start barking like mad because they hear that whistle. We can't hear it, but when we hit the burner, that goes off. It means you always have to be very careful of livestock, especially horses. Horses tend to be a little skittish anyway, but privately owned horses tend to be skittish and they'll hear that noise. That noise will only carry about 100 feet, so you just have to make sure you're not close to them.

I've seen cattle stampede and go through three difference fence lines with that stampede before they stop. Of course, the vet bills then are your responsibility, because you caused it. That can be very expensive and not covered by insurance typically. You have to be very careful of that. One time here in Reno, as a matter of fact, I found a lot that I was going to come into, and there was a big tree on the edge of the lot. Not a lot...it was a fairly large pasture. My passenger said to me, "Why don't you just land on the street on the other side of the pasture, because the crew can get to you."

I said, "Okay, that sounds good." It looked like a good landing place.

So we overflew the pasture and landed on the street, and turned around and looked back at the pasture. Here under the tree was a great big bull. [laughs] If I had landed there, it would have been interesting, to say the least.

You have to be aware of what's around you and constantly be on the watch, especially in rallies, for the balloons. If the fabric of the balloons touch in mid-air, that is called a kiss, and it does no damage at all. If the basket hits the fabric of another balloon, you could well rip the fabric and cause the balloon to crash. You have to be very careful of other balloons in the area.

In the Albuquerque races, it seems like that would be a big risk with so many other balloons.

It is a big risk, and that is one of the reasons I decided not to fly Albuquerque anymore. I haven't flown it for probably fifteen years because of that. It makes me too nervous.

How do the radios work and how to you stay in contact with your crew during a flight?

We use FM radios on a special business band. If you have a big race like the Reno race, you can typically have several different pilots on that same band, which can make it difficult. We do have privacy settings on those radios, so the radios I use have ten different sub-bands on them that I can switch over to. Typically it would be just me and my crew talking back and forth so they don't have to pay real close attention to everything that is said on the radio.

One of the big dangers of ballooning is the chase vehicles getting into accidents, because the driver is so intent on watching the balloons, he forgets to drive the car. If you only have one person chasing, they're trying to listen to the radio, talk on the radio, and drive the car at the same time, and they'll run into something. We have to be very careful not to allow that to happen and instruct them beforehand that one person drives the car,

another person talks on the radio, and you have to be very careful to not be watching balloons while you're chasing, or at least while you're driving.

Can you talk about different places you've landed and things you've had to negotiate when landing?

The biggest danger for balloonists is power lines, because power lines can cause death several different ways. You have to be acutely aware of that. We have to be very careful of power lines. We have to be very cognizant that the wind can shift at the last minute, so we can't land parallel to power lines. You typically want to be well away from them in case the wind shifts as you're getting down close to the ground so you still have a chance to get the balloon on the ground and stop it from moving into power lines.

There are other hazards, like running into obstacles and things like that. You want to make sure you're in an area that is relatively clean, which is why we use tarps. We put tarps down over the ground so that we can protect the balloon a little better.

One thing that we do do is called a splash and dash, where we will actually go in and land on the water in a lake. One of our favorite places to fly the balloons around here is Prosser Reservoir, just to the west of us near Truckee. As you're coming down, making your approach to water, it is extremely difficult to gauge how far away from the water you are because the water changes your depth perception. The idea of coming in and tapping the water and then flying away again is very difficult to do. Because it's so difficult, we do it as often as we can. [laughs] It is one of the challenges we really enjoy doing.

When I first started learning how to fly, I did indeed get into water up to my knees,

and that changes the characteristic of the balloon because it adds a lot more weight in the basket of the balloon. Another thing we can do is go down and stay just on the top of the water and let the breeze blow us along the water. You can actually produce a little wake behind the balloon. A few years ago I did that up at Prosser and had the people in their fishing boats come over and talk to me while they were fishing. I had a guy that was rowing his boat as an exercise thing come over and talk to me while I was just sitting on the water. It's a fantastic thing to do. On the other hand, you can get stuck over water, which has happened to me. At Prosser I was stuck for forty-five minutes over water one time and was starting to really get worried that I wouldn't get a breeze to take me off of the water to be able to put the balloon down. After forty-five minutes, a little breeze came up and took me to the shore.

What are you trying to accomplish in balloon races?

There are several different contests that you can enter into in balloon races. The most typical is called the hare and hound. It is not a race in terms of a timed race to see who can get there the fastest. We carry little bean bags with a long streamer on the bean bag, which may be six feet long. We'll have a hare balloon take off. Usually as soon as the hare takes off, then the other balloons are allowed to start inflation, which means that there can be twenty minutes before the other balloons can take off and chase the hare balloon.

The hare balloon typically flies for a half an hour to forty-five minutes, and then sets down. They place a large X where that hare balloon set down. The other balloons then come with the bean bag, which is numbered with your particular number or your name on

it, and we try and throw the bean bag into the center of the X.

To give you an idea of how competitive the Reno race is, it is by invitation only, and some of the best pilots in the country come to the Reno race. One year I got my bean bag into the inside of the X. The X is 30 feet from the center to the outer edge of the X. I got within that 30 feet, just inside it, but within it. There were nineteen other balloons that got in closer than I did that day. So getting inside the X was the nineteenth place, which I felt was pretty good for flying a seven-story aircraft that you can't steer. It is very competitive. I am not a real competitive pilot, but some of the pilots are out just to do that and concentrate just on doing that. I go out to have fun with it and enjoy the fun of it. I did get into the money last year. I got close enough that I got a \$250 check. I was pleased with that.

Can you describe any traditions or superstitions associated with ballooning?

One of the biggest traditions is the connection of ballooning and champagne. Ballooning was the way man first flew, and that was a little over two hundred years ago in France. When the balloon landed, the peasants saw this huge, monstrous, brightly colored thing coming out of the sky, belching smoke, and they thought it was from the devil. They ran out with their pitchforks and destroyed the balloon, thinking they were killing the devil.

The balloonists back then tried to figure out a way to stop and show them that they were indeed from the balloon world and they were not bad people. The one way they could think of was champagne. They took a bottle of champagne and would hang it below the balloon basket as they were coming in, and the people would recognize that. They would

indeed give that bottle of champagne to the peasants, which back then, two hundred years ago, a bottle of champagne would make a peasant a rich man. That was a very expensive gift for peasants at that time.

To this day, we still celebrate the successful balloon flight with a toast of champagne, and we still carry an extra bottle of champagne to give to the landowners as a thank you for allowing us to use their land whenever we land.

Can you describe different events around the country you've attended for ballooning?

I think Albuquerque is the farthest one away that I went to. I typically do six events a year, starting out in February with Lovelock. They have a balloon rally called Lovers Aloft in Lovelock, and I go to that one.

We have another rally at Prosser Reservoir in the middle of the summer. The one that is the farthest away that I go to is at Sonoma. I fly in the wine country down there, and that one is coming up next month. I do the Reno race, and I've already mentioned the Carson City race. Then we do a little race up at the Black Rock Desert.

That seems like a good area—big, flat, and no power lines.

The longest flight I've ever made was 35 miles, and the playa on the Black Rock is typically 35 miles wide and maybe 100 miles long, so you can go a long ways without running into anything out there.

As a matter of fact, one time I was flying and the wind kicked up. I was coming in for a landing. One of the dangers of ballooning is having high-wind landings, because that can get out of control and dangerous. This was a good chance for me to test my skills in

high-wind landing. As I was coming in for the landing very slowly, my chase crew was right beside me, and they clocked me at 35 miles an hour. I said earlier that they won't let us fly over 10 miles an hour in a typical rally, so 35 miles an hour was... I hit the ground and my chase crew looked at the odometer on the car as we hit, and he watched it until the balloon finally stopped. There are ways of making it stop faster, but I decided to see how long it would take me to stop the balloon just on its own at that speed, and it was over a mile that the balloon drug in the playa. The thing was, there was another 20 miles to go before I would hit anything. [laughs] I could take the time to see.

If you were to weigh the air inside my balloon, it would weigh over 2 tons. If you have 2 tons in motion and nothing to stop it but the ground hitting a small basket, it's going to move it a long ways.

Can you tell me about the Reno Balloon Races and how you first became involved?

The Reno Balloon Races were first held in 1982, which was two years before I bought my balloon. I was involved in the races from when I had the balloon. However, they had a restriction at that time where they would not allow local pilots to fly in the balloon race, the idea being that out-of-town pilots would bring more tourists into town. We disproved that through the years, so it was a few years before I could actually fly in the race. During those years I acted as a launch director for the balloon races, though, so I was involved with them then.

I have flown every year since then. I think 1986 was the first year that I flew in the Great Reno Balloon Race. There was one year I missed because of ruptured disk in my back, but other than that, I've flown every year.

How do the Reno Balloon Races compare to other balloon rallies you know of and ones you've been to?

The Reno race is one of the most prestigious races in the United States, and well known throughout the United States. The largest is the Albuquerque race, and they're currently running about 700 to 800 balloons, whereas the Reno race runs around 100. I think our high was 120 balloons and the low was probably 80 or so.

The Reno race tends to be much more exclusive in that it is invitation-only, so they have a very exclusive set of pilots that fly at the race. It's my understanding that there is a long waiting list of pilots who want to get in, but they can't because all the positions have been filled. It is not the biggest nor the richest race, but it's certainly up there. It is the largest one that I fly in typically these days. It's a good race. We enjoy it. I enjoy it.

When you first became involved in the races, do you remember other people who were helping with volunteering and putting on the Race?

Definitely. Although I'm not sure how long balloon pilots stay as balloon pilots typically, but most of my old friends have retired from piloting. I was meeting with one ex-balloon pilot named Gordon Harris yesterday, who was in the sport just before I was. He actually still owns his balloon, but hasn't flown for many years. One of the problems with the sport is that we are not replacing the older pilots that are retiring with newer, younger pilots. It is so difficult to get into, and so expensive to get into.

What other purpose do the balloon races serve beyond the competition and something for the public to enjoy?

Of course, it is a huge social event for the community. For many years it was the top event in the community, although I believe it has been replaced with the Hot August Nights as a special event. It is still very much a favorite and can draw up to 100,000 spectators, so it is very good for the economy and for the tourism industry in town.

It remains one of the few races where there is no admission fee, so you can actually get into Rancho San Raphael without paying a fee and walk among the balloons as they are inflating. That is a tremendous sight to see when you're right next to a balloon as it's going up. You can stand there and look at balloons all the way around you. They're so massive and huge, and to see them come alive like that is a great thing to see.

It is a very beloved special event here in Reno. Many people I talk to tell me that they have watched this event for years and years. A lot of people that live, for example, in University Heights will have annual parties where they'll invite people over to watch the balloon races from their back yard, where they can see the balloons going up. I was talking to one person that said that they had done that for eighteen years. Every year they have a party.

Is there a fee for pilots to enter the race?

The Reno race does have a \$50 fee that you have to pay to register, and that is refunded when you show up, but it is a registration fee. I believe that has more to do with the insurance on the fee versus anything else. Typically you don't have to pay for a rally. The rally will give you free propane for your flight, a motel room to stay in if you're an out-of-town pilot, some food—not necessarily all your meals, but certainly some of your meals—and a pilot pack.

The pilot pack sometimes has a lot of promotional items from companies. I have so many pins I can't count them, with names of companies on them that we get in the pilot pack. They also have some very good things, like jackets with the Reno logo on them and that kind of thing. I've been doing it so long and have so many jackets, I'll never run out. [laughs] Sometimes you get sweaters, sweatshirts, or t-shirts. I have a lot of balloon-related t-shirts.

So to answer your question, yes, in the end it costs me money to keep up the sport, but certainly it gives me a free weekend that I would not otherwise have. I'm certainly not making money out of it, but I don't pay for everything. Some of the better rallies will provide what they call show-up money, and you'll get a check for maybe \$100 or so to help defray the cost of gasoline just to get there and things like that.

How much does it cost you to do one flight?

The bigger expense comes in the yearly maintenance and inspection, and the yearly insurance. Those two things are your biggest expensive. Of course, they are not necessarily dependent upon how much you fly in terms of how much you're going to have to pay. If you don't fly very much, then the cost per flight goes way up. There have been years where I have had to pay about \$100 per flight for insurance, and that was just because I didn't fly very much. Some of the other pilots that flew a lot that year were spending maybe \$25 a flight, because they don't change your insurance rates based on the number of hours you fly.

The maintenance and the cost of the annual inspection is the same whether you've flown a lot or not. It only varies if you have to have repairs done at the time of the inspection.

What other events are associated with the Reno Balloon Race?

The people that put on the races try and get the community involved as much as they can. For example, the Reno race has a competition among the schools, and they have the school students make balloons out of crepe paper. They will glue these balloons together and put them over a fire, and the balloon will fly up and away, usually only 100 feet in the air, but maybe 200 feet, and it'll go downwind a little bit. They have competitions among the students. So Reno race has maybe fifty of these balloons out there doing that every year to get the public involved and the students involved in that.

The Reno race also has an organization called the Aeronauts, which are the volunteers who put on the race. They do everything from traffic control and bringing the people in, to checking special parking (they have special parking permits in areas where people can park in) to actually helping the out-of-town pilots with crewing jobs, and then to cleanup of the area. That is a big plus for them.

We are involved in some promotions throughout the year about the annual race. For example, there was a group of people that came in from out of town that were sponsored by the Greater Reno Area Chamber of Commerce. They were travel agents that were brought in to promote the Reno area. For that, several of us balloonists brought out our balloon baskets and set them up at the Legends at Sparks Marina and talked to these travel agents as they came through about the balloon race and about ballooning in general and the area. There are a lot of activities involved in that sense to promote the race.

Besides piloting and participating in these promotional events, have you helped out with

the balloon races in any other way? Have you served in any formal positions?

I have not served in any formal positions. I have indeed helped out quite a bit with the training of the Aeronauts in how to crew for balloons back and forth that way. I have done some promotional flights for them, where they try and get flights done before the fact. If people see the balloons in the air a week or two weeks before the Reno races, then they get a little more excited about the race. I've done that kind of thing.

I've helped crew. Some of the pilots will take their balloon out to the local elementary schools and tether the balloon. My balloon being so small, it's not a good balloon for that type of activity. It can do it, but it's not the best for that activity. I've helped the other pilots crew during those times. It takes a lot more crew to tether a balloon than it does to free-fly a balloon, so they need extra people.

In all the years you've been involved, what changes have you seen in the Reno Balloon Race?

The races have, of course, gotten much bigger through the years, so we've seen it grow and grow to its size now. It has certainly had difficulties during the recession because the sponsorship fell way off. The preferable thing for them is to get corporate sponsors, so they've put more of an emphasis the last few years on recruiting corporate sponsors rather than what they call a family sponsorship, but they do still allow the family sponsorship.

When we first started, I mentioned before that they did not allow local balloonists to fly in the race. We had quite a little bit of a fight over that one with the board, until we got that straightened out. They thought that we wouldn't be able to get sponsors, and we said,

"We'll prove that we can get sponsors. Just give us permission to fly. We'll go out and get our own sponsors." The first few years that we did that, we had more sponsors than we knew what to do with. We'd each have maybe four or five sponsors who were willing to sponsor us. Now they do most of that themselves.

Have there been years when attendance was especially large or small?

I have seen pictures of St. Peter's Square when the pope comes out and speaks to the masses, and I have taken off from the Reno race and flown over the crowds of people, and it reminded me of St. Peter's Square. There were shoulder-to-shoulder people all crowded around the spectators' area.

Another thing that has happened in recent years is the traffic has become a huge problem for the races and for the city in traffic control. It used to be that they would allow parking on McCarran Boulevard right above Rancho San Raphael, and people would come along with motor homes and park there starting maybe a week before the race. Now they don't allow parking along there anymore, which is sort of a shame, because it was almost traditional for people to park there. The race officials and the Reno Police Department thought that there was a problem with pedestrians in that area, so they outlawed that. We used to fly, and as you would take off, you would see all these motor homes and all these people up all along McCarran Boulevard.

How supportive has Reno been of the balloon races? Has that changed at all over the years?

I don't think it's changed, but I think the Hot August Nights has gotten more popular over the years. The city still supports the races,

though. It's rare that I can talk to somebody that doesn't know about the races. They might not know exactly when they are, but it seems like everybody's heard of them and can tell you stories about the races. A lot of people say, "I had a balloon land in my back yard." I think people have been generally very supportive of the races through the years, and that continues.

What have been some of your more memorable experiences of the Reno Balloon Races?

I had one experience that was very funny. Typically they would play the National Anthem, and one balloon would take off and display the flag underneath as they were playing the National Anthem. The balloon pilots would stand next to their balloon. We would take off our hats or have our hands over our heart and listen to the National Anthem. Well, the balloon was the Eagle balloon that year and it took off and was very slowly crossing the field at maybe 100 feet up. The field was very quiet and the National Anthem is playing, and here came a gaggle of geese in their typical V-shape, just "quack, quack, quack," honking along. All of a sudden the lead saw the Eagle, and it was sheer pandemonium for that gaggle of geese. One was going up sideways, every which way, and the whole V just sort of disintegrated, geese flying everywhere. It was very difficult not to be laughing out loud as the National Anthem played. [laughs] Geese were going every which way. They did indeed go around and make a wide berth of the Eagle, and they never did quite get back into that nice V-shape that they typically fly in. That was very funny.

Is there anything else about the Reno Balloon Races that is important to include?

I think besides just the race itself and the balloons themselves, some of the activities that go along with the races...an example is balloon pins. Many pilots have balloon pins of their individual balloon, and they're cloisonné pins. We will trade these pins among each other. Several of these that you can see here are local balloons. The individual races will also have balloon pins from the race. This tends to get to be a big collector's kind of activity, where people watch and trade pins between each other and buy pins from various collections.

They have even made a series of postage stamps of balloons. Here are two pins showing the postage stamps that they've made, which are, of course, a big collector's item—both the stamps and the pins of the stamps.

The other thing is the posters. I have a collection of posters there in my front hallway that are from various rallies that I have actually flown in, many of which are the Reno rallies. Reno is very big on posters, and there is very much of a collector's item thing with them. One of the posters that I have framed in my hallway I have actually seen for sale for about \$1,000. It was one of the more popular Reno race posters and there is big collection activity going on with them. That is something you don't see very often.

The other thing is the t-shirts and the jackets. The Reno races had some very nice jackets that they've given away every year, and you can buy extra of those jackets. The ones this year are for sale for \$95 apiece. They will give one to the balloon pilot for free or as part of the pilot pack, and then you can buy extras if you want. This year they have limited the pilot's jackets to one color, and any that you buy are a different color, so it makes it even more special for the pilots.

Have the races always been in September? Has that changed?

No, it hasn't. The reason for that is they put it the week before the Reno Air Races, the idea being there that people will come to town for Labor Day weekend and then maybe stay over for the Reno races or come for the Reno races and maybe stay over for the Air Races, or come early for the Air Races. It is a specific weekend because of those activities, to bring in more tourists.

How many times do you fly in one weekend during the races?

The race starts on a Thursday with Media Day, which is not a part of the actual competition. They take up local dignitaries and things like that. The actual competition is Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and the scores you get are cumulative for those three days. So, even if you came in first place on one given day, you might be knocked out of the entire race because other people have come in third three days in a row and get a lot more points that way. It is a cumulative score, not just a one-time store. So there is three days of racing and many times four days of flights.

What's the best score you've received over the years?

Last year was the only year I got in the money. I'm not competitive and I don't go out to do the races like some of them do. It's interesting that you usually see the same names in the Winner's Circle year after year, or close to it. The top 20 percent of the guys always seem to be in the running.

What are the most popular aspects of the races for the public, do you think?

In terms of the general public, the two areas that are the most exciting and the best

liked are the Dawn Patrol, which are the balloons that take off before the sun comes up, and the special-shaped balloons, like the bees that fly at this race. I think RE/MAX Realty has a cartoon house with cartoon characters around it. Smoky the Bear, from the Forest Service, is always a favorite. The champagne bottles, and things like that, are popular.

We make friends with other pilots. One of the nice things about going to these rallies is it's not always the same group of pilots at every rally, and sometimes I get to see pilots that I've known for many years. I may only get to see them once a year at a given rally, say, out in Elko. I go to the Elko rally and will see some pilots that I haven't seen for a year, but see them every year at that rally.

During Dawn Patrol, are there lights inside the balloons that cause them to glow the way they do or is that just the propane?

Oh, yes. [laughs] The actual burner on those balloons has a setting that changes the way the propane burns. The burners are made so that they can burn the propane very efficiently, but when they do that, there's very little light let off from that burn, and it is a blue light because it's so much hotter as it burns. They have a way of just throwing out some raw propane and letting it burn, and it's a bright yellow flame when they do that. They have a setting on their burner that they can flick, and when they hit the burner, then it will cause that glow and make the balloon glow.

My balloon does not have that setting on it. I can futz with the burner and how I turn it on to make that kind of light, but I have to do it manually. I can't just set it and then hit the burner. So typically my type of balloon does not fly Dawn Patrol.

It's just the way the propane burns. Of course, the more light you get out of the

propane, the less heat you get because it's changing the propane into energy, and light takes a certain amount of energy. If you watch them real carefully, you'll see them burn in between the light flares. It, by the way, is the same when the special shapes go up in the dark and they don't fly away, but they just glow at night. It is the same kind of thing—you have to set the burner to make that where it doesn't burn efficiently.

Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to include?

Let me tell you about two of my favorite flights that I remember throughout my career. One is in Albuquerque. The Rio Grande River runs down through the city of Albuquerque and it meanders through a mud plain, so there'll be trees on the side and then this mud plain and the river itself will go back and forth. It is pretty wide—maybe a block and a half to two blocks wide. On one flight I got down into the river plain and was flying up river, and I would hit the water as it came underneath me. Then if I came to some mud, I would lift up just above the water and then back into the water as it meandered back that way. I spent about an hour in the river doing that, which was an exciting thing to do.

The second most memorable flight I had was up here in Truckee, and I was flying from the Truckee Airport across the valley to Prosser Reservoir. In order to do that, I had to get up about 3,000 feet above the ground and maintain that altitude to make it all the way across the valley. As we were doing that, we had a bald eagle fly directly below the balloon, about 100 feet below the balloon. I doubt that many people have seen a bald eagle from above. That was almost religious, to see that happen. There were three of us in the balloon, and none of us had a camera.

[laughs] What a sight. What a sight. Those are two of my favorite flights.

Does your family enjoy riding in the balloon with you?

My wife used to get up and crew with me a lot during the early days, but she's tired. She's not a morning person like I am. She, of course, comes out to a couple of the rallies a year with me, but typically she'll just let me go do my own thing. When my kids were growing up, they came out for every flight and helped me crew, because when I started, the kids were maybe ten and twelve. Since then they have grown up and had kids of their own. Now my grandchildren come out. They're a little too young to crew for me yet, but they certainly enjoy the races, and that makes them something special at school because their grandpa's flying a balloon in the races.

One thing that we do up at Prosser Reservoir that you can't do in any other kind of aircraft is we will pick pinecones out of the tops of the pine trees. The balloon is so gentle, that you can sort of steer it just into the tops and pick up the pinecones. You can't do that with any other kind of aircraft. It is a fun thing to do.

A lot of the pilots will make trading cards very similar to baseball trading cards, with a picture of their balloon on the front and then some stories about the pilot and accomplishments or the type of balloon on the back. I have not done that, but a lot of the pilots do do that.

This might be of interest to you. Every year they give us a nametag to hang around our necks when we fly, and you'll see they have holes in it. When we get propane, they will punch a hole. Some of the holes, like this one, is in the shape of a heart. These are a collection of my main badges from the

Great Reno Balloon Race through the years.
Unfortunately, they didn't do it every year, so
I haven't got badges from every year, but they
make a new badge every year.

They've gotten bigger through the years.

A little bigger, but that first one you see
there is huge. It's bigger than all the rest of
them. These are all just from the Reno race.
I think there is twenty-eight years of flying
here.

We have just one other thing we can close
with. This is called the Balloonist Prayer. "The
winds have welcomed you with softness, the
sun has blessed you with his warm hands,
you have flown so high and so well, that god
has joined you in laughter and he has set you
gently back again into the loving arms of
Mother Earth."

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me about where you were born and where you grew up?

Mel Shields: There is a small city in southeastern Montana called Miles City, named after Nelson A. Miles, who was there during the Custer expedition. I was born there in 1945. My father was a railroad worker and a barber when the railroad laid him off. It was work depending on the economy. My mother was a homemaker until about when I was in the fourth grade, and she became a bookkeeper.

I attended Custer County High School, named after General George Armstrong Custer, one of the great military geniuses of our time. In 1963, I graduated and got a special scholarship to the University of Chicago because they decided they needed to have a more rural influence in their student body. Exactly how rural I was, I don't know. I worked on some ranches and things, but I wasn't really a ranch kid.

I went to the University of Chicago for my bachelor's in English and my master's

in English, and I came out to Reno in 1969 because I got a job at Reno High School to teach English. I taught at Reno High School 1969 to 1982, and then I went up and opened McQueen High School with the assistance of a few other people. I was there for twenty years, and retired in 2002. That's my professional life.

What interested you in English? Why did you choose that as your focus of study at University of Chicago?

I had always been an extremely avid reader. When you lived in Miles City, Montana, growing up in the 1950s, that's what you did. That's what I did, because we didn't even get television until I was in the fourth grade. We only had one channel, one program every night, and *The Mickey Mouse Club* in the afternoon— that was it. Although that was exciting to me at the time, the public library was more exciting. I just started to read to pass the time and became extremely interested in literature. I loved to read it and loved to teach it.

I developed a really big interest in movies at that time, too, because we did have movie theaters. The town had about 9,000 people, maybe 8,500, but there were three movie theaters when I was growing up. My father and mother never restricted my access to movies. I could see anything I wanted to see. I could also read anything I wanted to read. I think my father was more pleased I was reading than anything, so they never censored me or said, "No, that's not a book for you."

I loved to read. When I went to the University of Chicago, I had some of the top English professors in the world, and they made me even more avid. I came out wanting to share that love of literature with students. I think I was pretty successful at it. They liked the classes.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first arrived?

I thought it was an extremely exciting city. I got a little apartment over behind Park Lane Mall at a place called the Golden Terrace Apartments. They were new at the time. This was 1969. I drove by there not very long ago and they really are very trashy now. I wouldn't have been able to live there now. That is not putting down the people that live there; it is just that they've become old and decrepit—not the people, the apartment.

It was very exciting to me because I was teaching at Reno High School, and Reno High School had an excellent reputation pretty much nationally. I was very lucky to get that job. I got it, according to this wonderful mentor of mine named Margaret Muth, who headed the English Department there, because she saw the application and said we needed to have somebody in that wasn't UNR-educated, had a fresh perspective, and came from a different background. I always think

that faculties are more vital if they have that diffuse population.

I fell in love with the city because of several things. One, the casino entertainment was abundant and you could see some of the biggest stars in the world here. This was pretty much the only place you could see them. You could go to these beautiful dinner shows and have a wonderful meal in pretty elegant surroundings, and then somebody major would be on the stage. Although Chicago had its share of entertainment and I took advantage of it, particularly theater, we didn't have that casino atmosphere of showrooms.

I liked the fact that Reno was about a three-hour drive from San Francisco. I fell in love with San Francisco and subscribed to Best of Broadway Series for years. I went there for opera, theater, and the city. Reno was vibrant and had opportunities that other towns its size in the country didn't have, though, because of the existence of places like Harrah's, the Nugget, and eventually MGM.

Was there anything about Reno that surprised you when you moved here?

No, not really. I was maybe a little bit surprised at the natural beauty, because I pictured Nevada as being what Mark Twain said, looking like a singed cat. I just expected it to be desert. I think I was a little surprised that it was so close to Tahoe. Of course, the first sight of Tahoe was amazing. That was staggering. The natural beauty...I've never been a skier, I've never been a hiker, and I've not been a runner. I haven't been as healthy as I probably should have been over the years. I was surprised by the fact that it was a beautiful city.

What was Chicago like during the time you lived there?

Chicago was a major experience for me because I grew up in a town, like I said, of about 8,500 people with three movie theaters. I was incredibly homesick the first semester. I was ready to quit and run back to the safety of my little town. I had a great advisor who told me, "Give it one year. Then you can go back. Trust me, you can go back if you want to." By then I was in love with it.

University of Chicago is on the South side, and it's a major institution. It's somewhat removed from downtown Chicago, of course. It's in a neighborhood called Hyde Park. President [Barack] Obama came from there recently. I fell in love with things like Jewish delis. I had a Russian Jewish roommate. I had never met anybody who was Jewish. His mama fed me a lot. [laughs] I fell in love with the foods of Chicago—the ethnic foods. I had a friend from the Polish Southwest side. I had a friend from the German Northwest side. Their parents fed us abundantly. I was very lucky.

In that fall, I ventured I think a whopping \$2.50 at the time to get a ticket for a musical called *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and it blew me away. I could not believe they did on the stage what they did on the stage—how they moved the sets, how colorful it was, and how delightful it was. I fell in love with live theater. From then on, I saved every shekel I had to go see anything I could see: *Man of La Mancha* and *Fiddler on the Roof*—these were the times that those shows were coming out.

I remember that I absolutely had to get a ticket to *Hello, Dolly!* with Carol Channing, so I joined the Theater Guild, which cost me a huge amount of money at the time (it was maybe \$20), to assure myself a ticket to see Carol Channing. I fell in love with that show. That was the next year. Ironically, later in the years, Carol Channing became a personal

friend because she played here and I got to cover her. It was a real joy to remember those days. Chicago had some very established live theater. The other thing that really got me was the Art Institute of downtown Chicago was just incredible. It still is an incredible, great collection.

I liked to walk up and down the lake, on Michigan Avenue, and go into the lobbies of the big hotels—the Conrad Hilton, the Palmer House, the Sherman House, and the Drake on the North Side.

I was very lucky because I had a lady friend in college whose grandmother was inordinately wealthy and lived in this fabulous apartment at the Drake Hotel. She got theater opening tickets for opera, movie premieres, and shows, and she would take Peg, my friend, and me. She would actually call Peggy and say, "We've got an opening of such-and-such a show on Friday evening. Tell Mel I've ordered his tux." There was a store called Cohn & Stern, and they had my tux size on file for when she called, and they'd always have it ready for me because god knows I couldn't afford to rent a tux. I was struggling to put together enough money to feed my theater habit.

This same Peg had an uncle who was an architect, and he had a house on Gull Lake, Michigan, which we got to by driving down around the curve of South Lake Michigan and up into Michigan between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. We spent more time there playing Bridge on paddleboats and just goofing off.

Yes, it was rich and vibrant. Chicago was magnificent. It still is. I think it's a great city. We went to a place called London House, which was a jazz theater, and we had dinner. This was with another family I knew. I had been there only a very short time. This was maybe toward the end of my first year. I

remember leaning across the table while the musicians were playing, and the pianist was playing this really cool music...I leaned across, and very sophisticated, very smartly, said, "You know, he's pretty good." My host raised his eyes and looked at me and said, "He's Erroll Garner." Erroll Garner was one of the great jazz pianists of all time, and I didn't know I was seeing him. [laughs] Yes, it was all exciting.

I got a ticket to see Johnny Mathis at the Arie Crown Theater, and I remember being blown away by the fact that I was seeing this major singing star with an orchestra in a big theater, and that I could go to these things. I could see Sammy Davis [Jr.] at the time doing *Golden Boy* at the amphitheater, or I could see Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy, and Rosemary Murphy in *A Delicate Balance* at the Studebaker Theater. I would go to anything. I was a sponge. Just give me a ticket, and I'll go. Feed me, I'll eat. [laughs]

I worked to make a little extra money. The scholarship was very generous, but I worked at the library system at the university at checkout desks and reserve desks. I had incredible professors. Norman Maclean, who wrote *A River Runs Through It*, and Hans Morgenthau, a foreign policy advisor to a bunch of presidents...Saul Bellow was teaching there at the time, as was James E. Miller. I got to learn from the very best.

Politically what was the campus like at that time?

Liberal. We were about as pink as they come in the 1960s. Chicago was the Berkeley of the Midwest, you know, and we had our protests. I remember we took over the administration building and tried to shut down the university because they were ranking students for the draft, and the

draft was taking students who were ranking lower. They were releasing their rankings to the Selective Service, and that meant that the students who were not doing extremely well had a bigger chance of going to Vietnam. We sat in the Administration Building and took it over. I remember that. The university actually stopped ranking, which was pretty incredible. I think they meant to anyway. We didn't really shut down the school. They already knew that we were going to do it, so they had wisely moved most of what they needed. It was exciting to be there at that time, though.

The university also is a school that used to be a big football giant back in the 1910s and 1920s. Amos Alonzo Stagg was the coach there, and the Four Horsemen.... I think it was Wisconsin that actually had a lyric that said "Beat Chicago" in the school song until Robert Maynard Hutchins took over in the 1930s and said, "It's an academic institute; it's not a football school." He cancelled interscholastic sports, much to the uproar of a lot of the alumni. We hadn't had football since that time when I got there, and somebody wanted to reinstitute a minor team. I remember we all sat on the 50-yard line and wouldn't let football come back to the beloved University of Chicago. It is back now, but on a very small basis.

It was during Vietnam and it was a school of posters, flyers, protests, meetings, panel discussions, and a lot of activism. I assume that there was a so-called rightwing student group, but I wasn't aware of it. We were painted as being pinko liberals out to destroy the country, you know. It was great. [laughter] I loved it.

Coming from a pinko school to Reno, people in Reno didn't find it problematic when you moved out here?

I think Reno has always been a very open town as far as opinions. I was surprised. I know that there is a large Mormon population in Reno. I was surprised at that. I didn't know it at the time. It's one of the surprises. Nevada tends to be pretty conservative politically, which always made me laugh because we have twenty-four-hour gaming, twenty-four-hour drinking, and houses of prostitution in a couple of counties. We're known for our party atmosphere, but, by god, we're conservative and religious in this area. That has always been one of the great ironies.

Reno has always been surprisingly tolerant, though. I remember even in 1969 and the early 1970s that there were several gay bars in Reno, for instance, and they weren't harassed. I think there was a certain amount of police harassment, but largely, the population didn't care. It's always been a "live and let live" atmosphere, as far as that was concerned, or at least it was when I came here.

Politically, Reno is pretty mixed. One of my former students runs an organization called The Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, and it's an extremely liberal organization. I have another former student who writes the conservative viewpoint in *Reno News & Review*. The fact is, they're both friends. That's what I like about the area. Reno has been pretty accepting. It wasn't like moving to Utah, let's put it that way. [laughs]

What was the cultural scene like when you came to Reno? Do you remember other organizations that were around when you came here?

At the time they were called the Reno Orchestra, I think. They were not very good. Gregory Stone was extremely ardent and a very sweet man. His programs always lasted about eighteen hours. [laughs] They were okay, but at the time Reno was blessed with

house musicians. Every casino had its own orchestra, and they were incredibly skilled players, so they could contribute a lot to the community arts scene.

We also had a series called the Community Concerts, which brought in artists from out of town. That was pretty much our only access to national touring classical artists. We didn't have Nevada Opera at the time. I don't remember ballet being here. We didn't have legitimate theater tours like Best of Broadway or Broadway Comes to Reno.

We did host the Metropolitan Opera auditions for the West, and I remember picking up a lady who was going to be one of the judges. She was a former diva. I picked her up at the airport and was driving her to her hotel, and decided I would drive her down Virginia Street so she could see it. It was very bright at the time. We didn't have tattoo parlors and pawn shops right there. We had some pretty big lighted casinos. One of them was the Prima Donna, which had this garish display of showgirls out front on revolving platforms on the marquee overhanging Virginia Street. I remember we stopped in traffic, and she leaned over and looked up, and she said the most wonderful thing. She said, "Oh, my. That is so grotesque it is an achievement." [laughs] I thought that was pretty cool.

So those things were going on. We had occasional guest artists. I don't think the cultural scene was very active in Reno in the 1970s. We went to San Francisco for orchestra, opera, and theater.

We had Reno Little Theater here, which was fun, and they had a funky building on Sierra Street that was a cool place to go and do plays. I was in a couple of them. They sold that building to Circus Circus when they expanded. I always thought it was a major mistake for them to do it. They should have insisted Circus Circus build

them another theater, because they've been without a home since then. They never should have cut that deal, I think. The university theater was really pretty good back then, but mostly we left town to go to those things.

Now I think Reno's got one of the richest little cultural atmospheres you could have. Laura Jackson and the Reno Philharmonic... they are an amazing, wonderful organization of professional musicians, and they're running in the black. A lot of orchestras are going into bankruptcy across the country, including some pretty major ones. Reno is supporting its Philharmonic, which I think is incredible. I don't think Nevada Opera has done very well the last couple of years, but operas are very expensive and it's tough to run that organization.

Broadway Comes to Reno is bringing us some good shows. The Nevada Museum of Art is one of the great assets of the West. It has beautiful exhibitions, is intelligently run, and remarkably diverse in what they present. You can have a Maxfield Parrish show one minute, those wonderful Audubon prints the next, then an artist in light, like Leo Villareal. Now they're bringing in treasures of Egypt from the Brooklyn Art Museum and actually getting the head of Egyptian Antiquities Department from Egypt to do the opening lecture. I mean, they blow me away. Plus they had the Raphael painting, *Woman with a Veil*.

I like that campaign that they did with it. "Reno Got the Girl."

"Reno Got the Girl." Yes, that was from a former student of mine, actually. That was Tim O'Brien over at R&R Advertising. He does their stuff. For their anniversary this year, they're going to do a presentation. I love one of the taglines of the print ads they're

going to run, which is "Nevada Museum of Art, Made You Look." [laughs]

Tim is smart. "Reno Got the Girl." I was privileged because I do stories for them for the *Sacramento Bee*, and I get to go to all their openings. They had a press preview of the Raphael painting, but I was the only one there for a while, so Rachel there said, "I'll just let you stand." There was a security guard, of course, right at the entry. She said, "I'll just let you spend some time with the girl." I was actually in that room all alone with the Raphael for about ten minutes. It was almost spiritual. It was so great. Nobody else is alone with the girl. I think Nevada Museum of Art is superb. Culturally, we're richer.

It has grown over the years and it surprises people. If they're from the East Coast, they say, "What?" We had what's called a Fam Tour—Familiarization Tour—last year with some writers from the East Coast brought in by one of the area PR groups, like R&R. We were having dinner at Harrah's Steak House and I was talking to them about what was going on, and this man from New York, who couldn't have been more stereotypical, although it's not the way I picture New York... I love New York, but this man was extremely snooty. I remember he said, "Reno has an orchestra?" So I described the Reno Philharmonic. He said, "Reno has an opera company?"

I said, "Well, yeah, actually, Dolora Zajick, who is the outstanding Verdi mezzo, is out of Reno."

"You're kidding."

I said, "No." I was discussing Artown, which I think is another incredible thing, and I said, "*The New York Times* called it one of the best arts festivals in the world."

He said, "Do you get *The New York Times* here?"

I said, "Well, yes, I have it delivered by Pony Express every day. They drop it at my door." I was so furious. [laughs]

Artown is wonderful. Where else can you go and get thirty-one days of mostly free entertainment for people and families everywhere, with all these activities all day long? Some incredible talent comes in. It is a great organization.

Going back to your years as a teacher, how did the Washoe County School District integrate arts and culture into the curriculum?

It's not an area of expertise with me, because I was not involved in arts instruction. My best friend for forty years, Jack Neal, was the music director at Reno High School until he quit that and became a government teacher. He was always frustrated—and I think this is the case across the country—that bands, for instance, were at that time considered to be an adjunct to the sports program. They provided music at the games. There was the marching band for football and the jazz band for basketball. The coaches were continually yelling for everybody to come out to the games, but they didn't go to the concerts. It was a big frustration on his part.

Since that time, band music in Washoe County School District has become much bigger. I mean, there are bands at, like, McQueen High School...I mean they have these trailers of equipment, and they go to these band competitions. The kids are remarkable. The programs are remarkable.

As far as anything else, the schools have always been, for me, way too sports oriented. There are too many other riches in the school that aren't exploited. I do think theater has come a long way in local schools. They do musicals now and they're extremely well

attended, and they do beautiful jobs. They don't get nearly the press of local sports, though. I opened the paper the last couple of days and here are these full-color portraits of high school athletes who've been picked as the leading talents, and the coverage is huge. It gets a lot of play.

The Academic Olympics, for instance, which is a competition of the scholars, are lucky if they get a paragraph. They did have a little bit of coverage this year about Manogue High School winning, Reno High coming in second, Spanish Springs High School coming in third, and McQueen fourth, but that was it. I moderate those competitions, and if anybody wants to be excited, they should come and sit in one of those competitions and see how incredibly bright and sharp these students are in teams of six. We're lucky if a parent shows up, though. Nobody shows up. The parents will show up for the finals, some of them. We're in rooms at Wooster High School and we've got the coaches, some of the other team members, the two teams, the moderator, timekeeper, and the judge, and that's it.

If there was some coverage for things like that, letting people know what's going on for one thing, it would be better, but softball will get more coverage than that. I've always thought that that was one of the shames of the district—it is too sports oriented. A lot of students aren't into that; they like other opportunities.

How did you get involved in entertainment reporting and covering the casino shows and nightclubs?

I went into a bar one night and I sat next to a fellow named Foster Church. I knew Foster. Foster was with what was then the

Nevada State Journal, which was the morning paper. We had the *Reno Evening Gazette* in the evening. Foster was the “stringer” for *Variety*, which meant that he went to the casino shows and did the *Variety* write-ups—the criticisms. Well, *Variety* was called the bible of show business, and every entertainer wanted coverage in *Variety*, especially if it was positive.

Anyway, I’m sitting at the bar with Foster and we’re having a beer. Foster said, “I’ve got to leave the *Variety* gig because I’ve become the editorial-page manager at the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. They think it is a conflict of interest if I accept comps from the casinos, and *Variety* won’t let you write unless you are comped.” They wanted to be taken care of.

I said, “Well, god. I’ll do it.”

He said, “That’s not a bad idea. Why don’t you go with me up to the lake.” I had written a few things for the *Nevada State Journal*, a couple of reviews of local theater.

I didn’t have much expertise at the time. What I did have was a library in Miles City, Montana, that got weekly *Variety* out of New York. It always came like two weeks later, but it was there. I would sit there and pore through it because it was show business. God, I loved show business. I loved the movies. I would get to the end of it, back to the nightclub section, and there would be these reviews of clubs. There would be Harrah’s Tahoe—Belafonte, or John Asquaga’s Nugget—Liberace. I thought, “Oh, god, can you imagine?” In the 1950s, they always had these movies where people showed up at nightclubs and they would always be walking in and the maître d’ would say, “Oh, we have your table.” This was all the time. Could there be any better thing in life than to go into a place where they have a stage show, and have a maître d’ say, “Oh, yes, good evening, Mr. Shields. We have your table”? Oh, that was elegant. I thought it would just

be great to be able to go to those clubs and see those shows. Well, I had gone to some by this time.

We drove up one Friday evening to Sahara Tahoe, which is now the Horizon. Sahara Tahoe had a beautiful theater called the High Sierra Theater. It was Liberace’s lake showplace for years, and Elvis played there. We went to a show by Isaac Hayes, the *Shaft* guy. We went home and I wrote up a sample review, and thankfully, I had read all these *Variety* articles, so I knew how to write in what was called Varietese, where tickets became tix; people who were show-business patrons were tablers. There were the headliners, the co-headliners, and the supporters. A pianist wasn’t the piano player; he was the 88er. I knew this stuff, so I turned out this review of Isaac Hayes, who I didn’t think was a very seasoned nightclub performer at the time. I was so sophisticated. Actually, I was right.

Foster submitted that to the editor of *Variety* and said, “This is a guy who can replace me,” and they said, “Fine.” So all of a sudden I was the *Variety* stringer.

Other publications fell in line because I was with *Variety*. *Showtime* magazine called and said, “Could you do a column for us? You know what you’re writing about. You’re with *Variety*.”

I thought, “I don’t know what I’m writing about, but sure.”

The *Sacramento Union* at the time, Mark Twain’s old newspaper, called. “You’re the *Variety* critic. Can you write the show-business column side of Reno-Tahoe for us?”

I said, “Sure.” I was with them for two years. The *Bee* called and wanted to take me away from them and offered a better package, so I did. I debated it, but I did it, and it was wise because the *Union* went under like two years later.

The best advice I got was from a fellow named Abel Green, who was one of the editors of *Variety*. He said that there were three pieces of things never to forget. One is that the entertainment industry does not have a huge reservoir of talent for nightclubs. If you've got a new act, and they're really abysmal, say they're really abysmal. If they've got some potential, though, encourage them, because you're not in the business to destroy budding talent. Be nice to them.

Secondly, if you begin to get bored with entertainment, quit. Don't start inflicting your own *ennui* on our industry or on our readers. We don't need it. Enter the showroom every time thinking that you're there to see something exciting. Put yourself in the position of the audience. I loved that. The third one was the best. If the audience is standing up and applauding and screaming and hollering, and you didn't like the show, they're right and you're wrong. [laughs] I always liked that. There was a fourth piece, of course, which was never turn down a comp, but that wasn't official. [laughs]

Variety was an old-line publication and it was run by a bunch of hardnosed press guys that liked to root out stories about the entertainment industry, not entertainers particularly.

At that time I saw everybody, met most of them, and covered some major stories for that press. The Harvey's bombing, for instance, was a front-page story, as was the death of Bill Harrah. The *Reno Goes Big Time*...1978 in MGM Grand, Circus Circus, and Sahara Reno all opened. Money Tree, unfortunately, did as well at the same time. There were a lot of changes over the years, but that is how I got involved. I sat down at a bar next to a guy I knew and shared a beer, and that was it. A week later, I was the go-to guy for entertainment in Reno-Tahoe. According

to everybody, I knew everything. I started entering showrooms, and the maître d' would say, "Oh, good evening, Mr. Shields. We have your table." [laughter]

I did that for twenty years for *Variety* and thirty-seven now for the *Sacramento Bee*. Now it is no, "Good evening, Mr. Shields." It is, "Hi, Mel. How ya doing? It's good to see you." It's a much more friendly business than it first appears to be, and Reno-Tahoe both were blessed with the most incredible maître d's in the showrooms. The Nugget had a gentleman named Cor Vanderstokker, who was there forever. I remember I tried to slip a tip to Cor the first time I entered the room, and he said, "No, no, no. This is your job. I'm doing my job and you're doing your job. Take care of my captains and my waiters, but there is no reason to take care of me." I thought that was pretty amazing.

We had John Maniscalco at Harrah's Reno, who is legendary, and Bob Trim, Lenny Mormando, Kenny Mitchell, and the remarkable John Thomas, who opened the Ziegfeld Room at the MGM Grand with *Hello, Hollywood, Hello*. It actually opened with Dean Martin, and then it had the teaming of Joan Rivers and Mac Davis. How is that for a combo? Then it closed for a week and opened *Hello, Hollywood*. That was a 2,000-seat room and that was not an easy room to be maître d' of.

The MGM Grand opened, now the Grand Sierra...I always referred to it as the MGM Bally's Hilton Grand Sierra because it's been all of those four things. The MGM opened in 1978, and it had the Ziegfeld Theater, which is still there now as the Grand Sierra Theater, with 2,000 seats, dinner shows, cocktail shows, and the world's largest stage. That stage is one full acre. There may be larger stages now, but when it opened in 1978, there was nothing like it. They had that plane that came

out at the beginning of the show, with all the showgirls on the wings. People said it was a full-size plane. It was not a full-size plane, but it has the illusion of it. It is still there in the back theater.

That is how big that room is. That stage is massive, and they had three floors underneath and two floors up above, with those tracks and the elevators that came up and down. They have the two circular side stages, two smaller stages set up front, a descending passerelle walkway, and all the disks that came out of the ceiling. It was a major achievement.

Hello, Hollywood, Hello was an international destination. I'm sorry we have lost that sense of wonder in our entertainment industry, because Vegas has it now. Everybody has to go see *O, KA*, and *Cirque du Soleil* shows, and they can charge an arm and a leg for them. For thirteen years, though, we had *Hello, Hollywood, Hello*, and there wasn't anything like it on the planet. I loved that show. I must have seen it forty times over those years.

What effect did Hello, Hollywood, Hello and the MGM in general have on Reno?

Well, it was a big effect because it was really big-time. Now, people have to understand that Harrah's was the premier place to play for live entertainers for years. If you got a Harrah's contract, you made it. That was a mark of supreme achievement. Harrah's never paid as much as some of the other clubs could pay because they never had to. It was the treatment that you received as a star. You got access to the cars. You had anything you wanted to eat for as many people as you wanted to feed. You had a choice at the Lake between the guest house, the Villa Harrah at the bottom of Skyland there on the Lake, or the Star Suite, which was a two-story corner

suite at Harrah's Tahoe with a staircase up. It was just splendid. It was magnificent. You had anything you wanted. You could be flown places. He took care of you. Harrah's took care of you. We were always, actually, number one above Vegas as far as individual entertainers are concerned, and it was the thrill of their life when they got a Harrah's contract.

When MGM came to town, though, we hit the map internationally with a big bang. That hotel was as elegant as they came, and there wasn't anyplace else in town where you could go and bowl in a fifty-lane bowling alley, go to a huge theater, or go to two movie theaters and see classic MGM movies. They had MGM posters lining the hallways and some of the MGM Academy Awards were on display. There was a circular staircase down that was mirrored with a big chandelier. Everything was elegant. The casino was the size of a football field. It was big, and people came here to stay there and to experience it.

As a side note, there used to be a policy in showrooms, when entertainers were there, that there would be no photography. They used to have captains posted on the sides of the showroom during the show, and if they saw a flash or anything, they went over and confiscated the camera. It was absolutely forbidden. Now with everybody with a cell phone that takes pictures, you can't stop that anymore. They're going to take them. Entertainers have had to get used to the fact that there are going to be these flashes going off all the time from the phones.

The only performer that I've seen in the last couple of years that have asked the audience not to was Arlo Guthrie. They said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Arlo Guthrie requests that there not be any photography or cell-phone use during the performance." People have gotten ruder. Actually, a few people took pictures during Arlo Guthrie's performance,

with the attitude of, “You don’t have the right to ask me not to take pictures with my cell phone.” It’s just crude. Actually, it’s bothersome to me with most performances.

Then people will talk on the cell phone during performances, which astonishes me that they will do that. I’ve always wondered why people pay money to go to a show to talk during it anyway, to each other or anywhere else. [demonstrates] I think, “Why did you buy the ticket?”

I read that Frances McDormand is in an off-Broadway play currently, and during one of their shows, someone took a cell-phone call and everyone in the theater could hear it. Frances, from the stage, said, “We’ll just wait until you’re done with your phone call.” She stood there and waited for the woman to get off her cell phone.

I would be embarrassed if it went off. That’s embarrassing enough. To sit and talk? That is terrifying. When an Academy Award-winning actress is on the stage, or when anybody is on the stage, you pay them respect. There is a wonderful song that Peter Allen did, and it is one of the most moving songs I’ve ever heard in my life. It is called “Quiet, Please, There’s a Lady Onstage.” He wrote it about Judy Garland in her last years. Peter Allen was married to Liza Minnelli, and he died of AIDS a long time ago. He played here only once, which was at Harrah’s Tahoe. He was an incredible performer and a great talent. He had this song called “Quiet, Please, There’s a Lady Onstage,” and it’s very touching. It is about careers in decline and audience reaction to stars who aren’t what they used to be. I love songs like that.

I do think that people who are onstage deserve respect. Now, they may suck, and they may be god-awful...then leave. Just get up and leave. I won’t get up and leave a show,

because it is terribly rude and devastating if they see the critic walk out. [laughs]

I always envied George S. Kaufman, the great New York wit and critic, because one time he left—this was in the 1930s—a theatrical performance at intermission. He walked out, went next door a couple of blocks...a couple of storefronts down, back when Western Union was active and was the fastest way to get a communication anywhere. He had an instant telegram delivered back to the dressing room during intermission to the leading man that read, “Am watching your performance from the back of the theater. Wish you were here.” I would have loved to have been able to do that. [laughs]

To walk out is rude, though, and I’ve suffered through the most god-awful shows, where I just begged them, to not do another number. I’m thinking, “Please don’t do another number.” I want to be a courteous audience member and I don’t like to have people talking around me. It seems like the louder the performance, the louder they talk, too. They feel they have to scream at each other if it’s something loud, and almost everything is these days. It is all concert atmosphere, rock-concert atmosphere.

Cell phones have ushered us into a new era of etiquette and no-nos, and, unfortunately, a lot of people haven’t learned that.

Philharmonic audiences are still incredibly attentive and remarkably conversation-free. I really appreciate that. The Broadway shows I’ve been going to lately, I was really impressed with... the last one I saw was *Fiddler on the Roof*, here in Reno, and then *Legally Blonde* before that. I had these two young boys sitting behind me, who were maybe eleven or twelve years of age, and I thought, “Ah-oh. God, this is going to be terrible.” They were absolutely stone silent. It really is up to parents to teach their children how to behave, but that is a side point.

Who are the sources you've gone to that have helped your reporting over the years?

We're blessed in this town to have a lot of highly professional PR people. They're the people you go to. Every club that offers entertainment has a PR Department. Most of them are excellent. Some of them are practically nonexistent. It always astonishes me, for instance, that there can be a club that has entertainment, that they don't bother to reach out. But I'll be the first person to make the contact usually, though, because I don't assume they have to. The go-to people are the people behind the scenes, and they've become my friends. I don't look at them as being servants in any way. They're really good friends. We have a lot of lunches together. We have a lot of laughs together. I'll take them off property to lunch the few times I can get them to leave the property because they tend to be glued there, they're so busy.

Cutbacks have put a lot of responsibility on people. I mean, a very longtime friend up at Harrah's Tahoe is now director of entertainment, marketing, and PR, because they just keep letting people go and they move these further responsibilities on his shoulder. I worry about him terribly, because he just works awfully hard.

My relationship with the clubs is, I think, pretty professional. I'll get people out to lunch or I'll have lunch with them. They'll put me into a show. I'll write about the show. I very rarely ask for a dinner or any kind of special thing. I won't ask for a room unless they offer me a room at the Lake, and they almost invariably do, which is fine. I almost invariably don't take it because I'll drive back after the show. Sometimes I'll stay over.

I found that your association with a club has to be professional, and a lot of press people

get the idea that they can be taken care of all of the time for whatever they want. They'll start calling for dinners and want a comp. I've known people who want comp numbers. Get a grip. If I'm going to go out to dinner, and take some people out to dinner, I'll pay for it. If somebody happens into the restaurant who recognizes me and decides to take care of it, fine. That's wonderful of them. I'll write them a thank-you note and everything else.

Pretty much it is professional. I don't get in their way. Like I said, they've become friends and I'm not demanding. I won't ask for a room on a Saturday night. I don't ask for rooms, but I don't want one on a...I'm not going to go up and take up a seat on Memorial Day Weekend, because that's their profit and I don't want to get in the way. I could, but I don't want to.

Those are the go-to people—PR advertising. There are some really great PR groups in Reno: R&R [Partners] is a major operation; the Glenn Group is a major operation; Abbi PR is probably the friendliest people in those groups that you can possibly imagine. They promote the special events. RKPR. Ronele Klingensmith PR does Artown and Lake Tahoe Summer Music Festival. These are wonderful people.

Are they also the people you would go through to get an interview set up with a performer?

Yes. For instance, Artown is an example. This is RKPR. There is a lady named Kristen, and I'll email Kristen or she usually emails me way ahead of time. She will ask me, "Who do you want to interview for Artown?" I'll give her a list and she'll set them up.

The Encore Series, for instance, which I think is incredible for Artown...I got to spend some time on the phone, about half an hour, with Bernadette Peters, which was just exciting. Bernadette Peters is a goddess. I went

to her show and she was wonderful. Kristen set that up. I also spoke to John Lithgow, for half an hour. Oh, god. We laughed and swapped stories and had a great time. So those are usually...the performers are pretty much willing to do it. I didn't ask for Steve Martin because there was no need to. Steve Martin didn't need any promotion. I've covered him since 1976 when he was an opening act at the Nugget for Roger Miller, but he was going to sell out. There wasn't any need to promote him.

I'll also talk to the nonstarters, like ballerina Fana Tesfagiorgis too. I'll talk to little band members. I'll talk to rock and roll performers. I'll talk to anybody. If they want to get on the phone, I'll talk to them and write about them, because I really like to promote the area. I like to promote the special events a lot, because it brings people in.

I did an interview with Larry King two weeks ago. Now you're interviewing an interviewer...then he canceled that sucker. I had it all written up and submitted and it was going to press, and they had to yank it because he canceled. He called at seven o'clock in the morning. He was supposed to call at eight-thirty or something. At seven in the morning, the phone rings. I answer the phone. This is just kind of funny. He said, "Hi, Mel, this is Larry King. I'm calling a little early. Is that okay?"

I said, "Well, yeah, it's fine. I've got to get out of bed and grab my notebook and throw a robe on."

"I don't care if you wear a robe when you talk to me or not."

So I said this, and I didn't believe I said it, "Well, I don't want you fantasizing about what I look like fresh out of bed."

There was this pause and he laughed and said, "I picture you in Batman pajamas. Am I close?"

It started a very friendly conversation, which was nice. There was nothing pretentious about it, but I couldn't believe I said that. That was set up by the Silver Legacy El Dorado PR Department. They're incredible. They'll try to arrange anything that you can possibly want.

Grand Sierra has a great group of people. Harrah's has a great group of people. They're just all professional and they work hard. There are a lot of PR firms in the area, and these are hardworking people. God, it's a tough business.

Are there any tricks to talking to celebrities or artists?

Let them talk. They're going to talk about what they want to talk about, so I usually start off with, "What's up?" Frequently I don't have to say another word for half an hour. There are tough interviews, like people who want to do the interview, but they're not talkers. The one that pops to mind immediately is Eddie Arnold, the old country singer who is no longer with us, but he was pretty amazing. All Eddie wanted to do was tell dirty jokes. I could never print a damn thing he told me on the phone, ever. He always wanted to do the interview, and we laughed and laughed, but there was never anything. [laughs] He was a naughty old man. He was a lot of fun.

Sometimes they are rude. I had a comedian not long ago who was going to be playing at the Silver Legacy. After about five minutes, I asked him when his next comedy special was going to air, and he said, "Sooner, as soon as we finish this interview." I just said, "Obviously you don't want to do it, so thank you, and I'll hang up." There's no reason. If they're not in the mood to do it, why are they doing it? There is no reason to put them through it.

Sometimes they'll delay you several times and then you go past your deadline, and that really irritates me. I probably won't write about those people again because they've been rude and they don't have the right to be. I'll be there for the interview when they want me to be and I'll do it.

So, just let them talk. I think that is the joy. As far as backstage is concerned, or relating to these people, I've got a couple of guide rules. Number one, I've got to be asked back. I'm not going to go back and barge in to somebody if I'm not requested to be there. Number two, I won't overstay my welcome of fifteen minutes max in a dressing room. I want them to be able to go on with their lives. I don't want to be one of these people who sits down and says, "Yeah, I'll have a drink." They'll set the tone.

I learned that the very first time I went backstage. It was in 1974. It was Red Skelton. I learned an incredible lesson. It was entirely accidental. I was asked back to see him after his performance. This was at the Nugget. I went in the dressing room. I was greeted by him very warmly, and then he introduced me to his wife. Her name is Lothian Skelton. He adored her. He said, "You know my wife Lothian?"

I said, "No, I don't. It's nice meeting you."

He said, "Do you know who her father was?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Gregg Toland." Well, I'm a movie buff, so I just happened to know that Gregg Toland was the cinematographer for *Citizen Kane* and a few other major movies. He had developed deep focus. So I go all dithery. This was 1974, so I'm twenty-nine years of age. I just got excited, so I sat down with her and I talked about her father. She didn't remember him very well, but she'd been on a quest to learn more about him. I talked about some books I had and maybe she might be interested in them. We talked for maybe

twelve minutes or so, maybe thirteen...just yak, yak, yak with her.

Then I got up and said, "I know you have another show," because they did both dinner and cocktail shows then. I said, "I don't want to wear you out, Mr. Skelton."

He said, "No. Red, Mel."

I said, "Okay, Red."

"It's been a pleasure talking to you," I said to Lothian.

Red Skelton said, "I'll walk you out."

I said, "I can find my way out."

He said, "I know you can find your way out, but I'm going to walk you out."

He took my arm and he walked me out into the backstage area, and he said, "I'm going to tell you something. Everybody who comes backstage meets Mrs. Skelton and then they ignore her and pay attention to me. You came backstage and you talked to Mrs. Skelton and ignored me, and I will always love you for that. You will always be my friend." And he was, until the day he died.

He gave me exclusive stories about his tapes when there was this big scandal that he was going to burn all of his tapes of his shows because of a dispute with the writers. He wouldn't meet with any press under any circumstances. I was told that I wasn't to go backstage that night. I sat with my niece in the theater, and all of a sudden he entered the theater, all hunched over, snuck down to my table, introduced himself to my niece, told her how beautiful she was, and then said, "You have your notebook?"

I said, "Yes."

He said "Bring it back. I'll talk to you about the tapes."

The only reason he did that was because I paid attention to Mrs. Skelton, so we became friends. I learned that when you go backstage with people, you let them set the tone and you do not ignore the people with them.

I was backstage with Rick Nelson one time, and his brother David and his mother, Harriet, who was a big band singer in the 1930s were there. They're most known, of course, for *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Ricky Nelson was a very big star. Ozzie was dead at that time.

I sat down and I told Harriet Nelson, "When you sang 'Get Thee Behind Me, Satan' in the movie *Follow the Fleet*, which I caught on TV, it was one of the most exciting musical numbers I've ever seen in a movie."

Her eyes just bugged, and she said, "Rick, David, did you hear that? Me, Harriet Hilliard, not your mother, me." [laughs] They laughed, and it was extremely congenial.

You've got to do your homework and then just be comfortable. I've had people go backstage with me and they get tongue-tied. Actually, these people are human beings. My biggest advice on interviews or even meeting somebody is just let them be themselves and they'll be fine.

I was backstage at the Nugget one time with Raquel Welch. Now, this woman is gorgeous and she could be very cold. She was never cold to me. I adored her. I'm sitting on one end of the sofa and she is sitting at the other. She is all curled up and we're yakking away, and there is a knock on the door. In comes a writer who happened to work for the *Reno Gazette-Journal* at the time. He said, "I'm supposed to interview you."

She said, "I didn't know about that."

He said, "Well, I am."

She said, "Well, it's up to Mel if you want to sit in on our conversation."

I said, "That's fine. I know Tom. He can sit in."

So he sat down. She said on the show, onstage, if there was one question she didn't like to be asked, it was whether she preferred to do Broadway, television, recording,

nightclubs, or movies, because she liked all of them. So what is the first thing that comes out of his mouth? "What do you prefer doing?"

She said, "I can't believe you asked me that."

He said, "Why?"

She said, "Because in my show I said I don't like to be asked that question."

He said, "Well, I didn't see your show."

I thought, "Oh, god." I practically hung onto the sofa, because I knew what was going to happen. It didn't happen as an eruption; she just looked at him and said, "Leave."

He said, "Excuse me?"

She said, "Leave this dressing room now." [laughs] Now, if there is anything that would be—excuse the term—emasculating to a male, it would be to have Raquel Welch tell you, in this icy tone, to leave. He left and we laughed after.

I remember her saying something like, "Can you believe how incredible people are?" That was it. She was professional. Do your job. I mean, god...would I dare go backstage and talk to somebody if I hadn't seen their show? Would that be the biggest insult imaginable? I would never do that.

You have to pay your dues. You pay your dues by seeing the show, and sometimes, believe me, it is paying your dues. [laughs] You have to, like I say, do your homework. I always told my students homework isn't a task; homework is a joy if you look at it as another step forward in the development of your intelligence and cultural awareness. I know that sounds like a teacher-y thing to say, but I didn't succeed in the entertainment industry by not doing my homework. I would have been thrown out of dressing rooms time and time again. I was never thrown out of a dressing room. I was never asked to leave a dressing room; I was always asked in. I would never go in and say to the maître d', "Can you

contact such-and-such? I want to go back and see him after the show.” I never did that.

If the entertainer does want to have somebody come back after the show, don’t barge in after the show. Give them a little time to rest before you go barging back. They come off the stage, they’re sweaty, they’ve been working hard, and you’re back there going... It is just dumb. Give them a chance. If you’ve been asked back, give them a little break.

There is only one time I was really genuinely embarrassed backstage, and that was when I was talking to Shirley MacLaine the very first time. I was writing down some things. Shirley MacLaine is a tough lady. I adore her, but she is tough. We were visiting, and she looked at me and she said, “Mel, nobody can be this boring.” I was just devastated. I wanted to put a gun to my head.

Well, it happened to be the 1970s, and it was during the time that Anita Bryant was doing a big campaign in Dade County, Florida, saying that the schools should fire all gay teachers. It was a big homophobic campaign. I don’t know what made me do it, but I looked at her and I said, “Yeah, you’re right. Let’s talk about Anita Bryant. I hate Anita Bryant.”

She said, “Oh, honey. I’ll tell you what.” We went on about that political...she is very political. She gave me a story that I sold to *Newsweek*, I think. The story read, “Shirley MacLaine calls for all entertainers to boycott Florida orange juice and go against Anita Bryant.” She was the spokesperson for Florida orange juice. Shirley MacLaine said, “I owe my career to gay people. They design my costumes, they do my choreography, they dance alongside me, and they do my lighting. I couldn’t survive. There isn’t an entertainer in the industry who would be anywhere without gay supporting acts. They themselves may be gay.” She said, “It’s time to stand up.”

Well, god bless her, we became not pals, but we had a friendly relationship from then on. That was because she called me boring. [laughs] I was so excited to be here. She was one of the few people that I got very excited about going backstage to see, because I adored her. I thought she was a great actress. She had been with everybody from Sinatra to Khrushchev. She had written her books. God, you know, this was Shirley MacLaine. What I found her to be, of course, was an incredibly warm, engaging, wonderful woman.

One time I was backstage with her at the Nugget and we talked about a play I had seen in London. She said, “Oh, my god, I’m thinking about doing the film version of that play.” The play was written by a fellow named David Hare.

I said, “I really loved it. I’m not sure I understood it.” It was called *Plenty*. I saw it at the Olivier in London. I said, “I don’t know if I understood it, but I loved it.”

She said, “Oh, it’s complicated. Actually, he’s coming backstage now.” The writer was there. Some years later, she was at the Nugget. This is just a side story. I was sitting with a friend of mine in one of the booths, and next door to me is another critic who shall remain nameless. He was a person who decided that he didn’t like me because I wrote a negative review about Debbie Reynolds one time and I hurt Debbie, so he wasn’t going to have anything to do with me. Her opening act was a comedian named Freddie Roman, who was an old Catskill comedian and a great old standup guy. The show ended, and this critic was in one of these one-upmanship modes, so he announced loudly to people around him that they were going to go back and see Freddie, very loudly. He said, “Well, we’ll give Freddie a few more minutes and we’ll go back and see Freddie.”

I'm sitting there with my friend. He must have said it three times—loudly—that they were going to go back and see Freddie, indicating that I wasn't going to go back and see Freddie. Well, I didn't much care, but at that point this hand came under the curtain, and the curtain was lifted. It was Shirley. She said, "Mel, is that you?"

I said, "Yes."

"Then get your ass back here, honey." She just one-upped him, and I thought, "God bless her." [laughs]

Back to your original question, you let these people be themselves. You really are an intruder in their turf, and you're really a guest on their turf. If you think that you're more important than they are, you've got another thing coming, because you're not. You may have a certain power of the pen. *Variety* gave me a great power of the pen. A negative review in *Variety* was devastating. It hurt them, though I didn't set out to hurt. A positive review in *Variety* could help make a career.

I did a story for *Variety* one time that said that it was time to thank the Catskill comedians, like Myron Cohen, Henny Youngman, and Jan Murray, for giving us a great legacy of comedy. There was a new breed of comedian coming, though, and they didn't tell wife jokes or gambling jokes; they talked about life in an observational manner. This was a story I wrote. I said, "There are five of them, performing opening acts right now for Harrah's: Kip Addota, Kelly Monteith, David Letterman, Jerry Seinfeld, and Jay Leno. Of these, the best is Leno." Well, you know, he never forgot it. I call him. It helped his career tremendously.

I think that is another key. You have got to pay attention to the people who are coming up if you possibly can, because they're the ones who need the help. I can write about

James Blunt, for instance. James Blunt was just here at Legacy, and, god, what a great young entertainer he is. He did an interview with me on the phone. He didn't have to worry about it. He was selling out. He was charming. It wasn't helping him as much as if I were writing about somebody who was, let's say, an opening act in a lounge. Of course, there aren't any lounges anymore. We'll get into that another time.

What do you like about reviewing the shows and entertainment?

The shows. People amaze me. I'm still in awe of what they can come up with. I mentioned James Blunt. This is a kid—and I say kid in the most respectful manner, because he is a young man—who has these women just absolutely shrieking while he is on the stage. What amazed me about him was that he never acted like he deserved the screaming. What he did was sing his songs as honestly and as straightforwardly as he could, with a great band. Every now and then he flashed a smile that practically had some of them falling into a dead faint. Was he aware that he was doing that? I think so. The fact is, though, it was also sincere. It was this "God, I love being up here and I love performing." He would do these poses on top of the piano. He had the guts to go around the audience, out in the audience. There are a lot of entertainers that famously go out in the audience, or they enter from the audience. He entered from the audience. He was fearless.

At the end of the show, he did something I hadn't seen anybody do in twenty years. He came out...it was an old show-business shtick and somebody taught it to him, but I thought, "Oh, damn, kid, you're right. You're looking for the best." He came out and he had his camera, and he said, "Reno, Reno, Reno, I didn't expect you to be this wonderful. I really

didn't. You are just absolutely wonderful. I want to take your picture. Turn up the house lights so I can. Okay, right side of the house, middle house...." These people were screaming at the camera. I don't even know if he was taking the picture. It was just a wonderful thing to do for the audience. They bought right into it. I thought, "Who is teaching you, kiddo?" That dates back so far, since cameras were invented. It was just so smart. They all took a picture of him and he's going to take a picture of them. It was a gracious, lovely gesture.

I'm a big nut for magic. I know how it's all done. I sat backstage in the early days of David Copperfield when he was just an opening act for, believe it or not, Shields and Yarnell. He was co-headlining. I would sit back in his dressing room and visit while he was rigging for the next show.

I've known almost every magician that has ever stepped on a Nevada stage, and they still blow me away because of the art of it, and I can tell who has taught them. I'll see a young magician doing a manipulation and present a dove out of a folded piece of cloth, and I'll say, "Johnny Thompson taught him that." It has that expertise. I'm still in awe while I watch shows, even if I say, "Okay, now they're going to do this. Now they're going to do that. Oh, here it comes. There is the switch." I can see exactly when it became somebody else. That is okay, because it is a joy to see them.

Acrobats still astonish me—people who can go up and do amazing things in a hoop—and Chinese acrobatic tumbling acts, because they're fun to watch. It's like what Abel Green said: don't lose your love of entertainment, because if you lose your love of entertainment, it is going to become a drudgery to you and to your readers, and you're not going to help anybody's career.

I miss *Variety*, I really do. I wish I still wrote for them, but they sold and the new owners decided that all live entertainment worth anything takes place in the greater New York or greater L.A. area, which can be more provincial than small towns. They dropped the coverage from the rest of the country. When I was writing for *Variety*, they did a story on the Hitching Post in Cheyenne, Wyoming, because I stopped there one night and attended a show in their lounge. I mean, they were into it.

I love comedians who have incredible timing. I love singers who have amazing style. I like show-biz stories. I like every now and then when you have a chance to see somebody classic. Michael Crawford came to Harrah's Tahoe a couple of years ago. He was the original Phantom and he had done movies. It was an experience. I can sit and listen to Bob Newhart for probably twenty-four hours a day the rest of my life and still laugh. He is a sweet, sweet man. I like seeing [Don] Rickles. I love Joan Rivers. I absolutely love her. I like every grassroot thing about her. A lot of these performers, though, I can do their acts. [laughs] I know their acts, I've seen them so many times. Newhart actually said one time, "Be careful when you start mouthing my routine along with me, because I change a line every now and then." [laughs]

I still like to go out. I wish that we still had what we used to have. I wish we had the dinner show/cocktail show atmosphere again. I wish there weren't cattle-call seating, where you go in with a ticket and find your seat. I wish that we had that elegance, but a lot of things have taken away from that. It doesn't work economically anymore. The entertainers can plan large venues in other cities. There is no reason to do two shows a night or a two-week engagement. Two nights is the max.

I understand all of that, but I do miss the crystal. [laughs] I do miss the prime rib and the whole atmosphere of being with a lot of people for whom that was a very special night. They were going to see a star. They had made reservations, they were going to have a wonderful dinner, and that curtain was going to go up and there was going to be Shirley MacLaine, Liza, Liberace, or Donald O'Connor. Everybody played here. Everybody.

You mentioned the dinner show/cocktail show atmosphere and how that is now gone. Describe that atmosphere to me and what casino shows were like.

Well, the concept back then was elegance. Dinner shows seated at six o'clock. They had servings of salad, a main course, dessert, and cocktails—everything. The room staff was to be out of the room at eight o'clock when the curtain went up on the performer. The performer would play till nine-thirty, and then the checks would be delivered to all of the people. They would pay the checks and clear out the room.

The entire room was cleared out and cocktail service was prepared for another entire group of people who started seating at eleven o'clock, and the cocktail show was usually at midnight. It was a really tight schedule for the room staff.

I always admired the room staff. If they could feed, wine, and dine 1,800 people at the MGM or 900 people at the Nugget, clear out everything, get them all paid for and then do the cocktail show for another 900 to 1,800 people all in a night. I thought that was just extraordinary. It ran with complete precision.

The elegance of the dinner show was that they had dress codes. For a long time

gentlemen had to wear jacket and tie, and women had to wear dresses or after-five ensembles, as they called them. You simply weren't admitted if you dressed down. Nobody wore jeans. You wouldn't walk in in a T-shirt and cutoffs like people do today; they just simply wouldn't do it.

The dinners were good. John Ascuaga served his prime rib. There was lobster. Everything that you could possibly want on the menus were there. When I started writing, the dinner show prices began at \$5.50 for the chicken, believe it or not, and that included the show. Later, that became pretty standard. It would be a \$9.50 to \$10.50 minimum, which was still an unbelievable bargain. Of course, we're talking about the 1970s, and a lot of people had to save to come up with enough money to go to shows.

The room staff was extremely efficient. They were totally charming. I got to know them all personally, and I always had the same table or the same booth in whatever showroom it was. There was a wonderful maître d' at the Sahara Tahoe, which is now the Horizon. That showroom is now a theater, but it was a beautiful theater. This man's name was Lenny Mormando. Lenny was a great maître d'. I showed up one night to cover a show that happened to have Joey Heatherton sharing the bill with somebody. Joey Heatherton was this blonde, sexy woman, who was on TV a lot. Dean Martin featured her and Bob Hope featured her, and I always thought she was essentially talentless.

I went up to the booth and Lenny said, "Mel, I've got to show you something." He pulled out a drawer in his lectern, and he showed me a picture of myself that had been snapped somewhere in some showroom sometime by one of those camera ladies. They always used to go around the showroom

taking pictures for people. He said, "I've got instructions that under no circumstances is this gentleman to be allowed in the showroom. This is direct from Miss Heatherton. She does not want you covering her show again."

I said, "Well, I don't know exactly what to do."

He turned to his captain and said, "Show Mr. Shields to his usual booth, please."

So I went in. I covered the show. She was dreadful. You couldn't say she was anything but dreadful, bless her heart. I wrote this review that was less than complimentary.

He called a couple days later and he said, "Oh, my god. Oh, I was in trouble."

I said, "I'm sorry."

He said, "No, I just said, 'Look, Miss Heatherton, I don't know. I don't know how he got in. He was wearing a beard, he was in drag, something, but I didn't recognize him and he got in.'"

That was the relationship that you had with the maître d's over the years. They were friends and they knew that you would take care of their captains and you would take care of their waiters. That is something that is not there anymore, along with the house band. Every casino had an orchestra and they hired these people to back performers. When it was somebody like Johnny Mathis, Frank Sinatra, or Ray Charles, these orchestras would run up to forty pieces, with full string sections and everything else. Then for other entertainers it would be smaller groups.

Harrah's Reno had the John Carlton Orchestra when I was writing, so the John Carlton Orchestra was always on the marquee. At seven-thirty every evening, the curtain would go up for dinner music and the orchestra would play about fifteen minutes of easy-listening, lovely music for people to digest, because the show was going to start at eight o'clock.

The Nugget had the Don Conn Orchestra when I was there. It actually began as the Leighton Noble Orchestra. There was another one in there but I can't remember it. Don Conn, who also had the band for a long time at the top of Harolds Club, had a place called the Fun Room, where you could go hear Louis Armstrong for a two-dollar minimum—two drinks. [laughs] Those were the days. Harrah's Tahoe was the Brian Farnon Orchestra. Brian's daughter, Charmian Carr, was Liesl in the movie version of *The Sound of Music*. The Sahara Tahoe had the Al Tronti Orchestra.

In the old days, they had dance troupes. The Sahara Tahoe had the June Taylor Dancers. They would start with an opening number of showgirls and dancers, bring on the opening act and then bring on the headlining act. There was a full evening. They were modeled after the old 1950s TV shows like *The Red Skelton Show*, where they would always have dancers do a little number before the show started or the actual routine started. The June Taylor Dancers were on *The Jackie Gleason Show*, so they were very famous, and they were up at Sahara Tahoe. Maggie Banks, who started Nevada Festival Ballet, had the Maggie Banks Dancers at Harrah's Reno.

That isn't there anymore. The only entertainer that demands an orchestra that is still out there...well, there are two that I can think of: Paul Anka and Johnny Mathis. They play convention centers. Bob Newhart always wants a band, although he doesn't have any music in his act at all. He got spoiled when Harrah's had a band to play him on and play him off in the old days. He liked that and he insists on having a little band behind him through the whole show. They just sit there and laugh. They don't play anything. I always admire him for that, because musicians have to eat, and there was a time when they did. A lot of the core musicians of the Reno

Philharmonic and Reno Chamber Orchestra are veterans of the show bands, and a lot of them still pop up in different shows if they hire a band.

So that is what's different...the major differences. The atmosphere now is to make the showroom pay for itself if you possibly can, or at least have it be as small a write-off as possible. Bring in the entertainers, but charge for tickets and sell reserved seats. There is no more of the maître d' seating. In a way that is a godsend to a lot of patrons because they went into maître d' panic. They would think "How much do you tip this man to get a good table? Are we going to be seated off in Nova Scotia? Are we going to be up front? I don't want to come off as a cheapskate, but I also can't afford an awful lot."

I know of one incident when some staff were so greedy for tips that the captain would take a couple in and turn to them and say, "Do you want to sit together?" in an obvious plea to be tipped to seat them. Sometimes they were incredibly rude. Usually they were wonderful, though. That anxiety is gone for the showgoer now. They don't have to worry about that.

They also show up dressed abominably, though. They show up dressed like I am today, in a T-shirt, not even a pair of slacks, and cutoffs and flip-flops. It's incredible. It carries over to audience behavior, which is where another major change has taken place.

They used to have captains stationed at the front of the room, one on each side, in tuxedos, watching for people who take pictures, and they would go confiscate the cameras. Obviously you can't do that anymore with the cell phone cameras, but very few entertainers ask people not to take pictures.

People check their iPhones during the show, and all of a sudden there is this glow popping up. They paid a ticket to see

somebody like James Blunt, Jamie Foxx, or a contemporary entertainer, and they're sitting there texting their friends, letting them know they're there, and then checking to see if anybody responded. They put on Facebook, "I am at the James Blunt show. Great time." I think, "Why don't you enjoy the show and text later." [laugh]

There is a lot of talking, and back in the old days there was none of this shrieking either. There would be some cheering when an entertainer came out, but if somebody sang a song and hit a high note, you didn't have to put up with an entire audience cheering like it is some kind of major accomplishment to sing a note. It drives me nuts.

Michael Buble at the Reno Events Center had more shrieking... god forbid I should ever have to experience Justin Bieber, although I think he's incredibly talented and I'd love to see him. I am not going to put with the sound level of ten thousand screaming tweeners. I couldn't stand it.

Michael Buble was enough. You had these people... I don't want to be rude, but these women were running down the aisle holding up signs that read, "I love you, Michael. I love you, Michael." I can just see it. He's going to look out and he's going to see this woman and just say, "Oh, my god. There's the woman of my life and she loves me." It hasn't happened yet. [laughs] So audience behavior I think has really gotten bad. People are incredibly rude now.

You mentioned that some members of the house bands were also members of the Reno Philharmonic. Were musicians involved in any other Reno cultural performances?

Sure. The Nevada Festival Ballet started with Maggie Banks. The cast of *Hello, Hollywood*, *Hello* started a group called Artist

Project, and provided us with some excellent theater on their own. I remember they did a production of *A Chorus Line*, which is one of the best I've ever seen. Every one of those dancers and singers were multitalented and they were stage people. They were gypsies, basically.

I sat through one performance of *A Chorus Line* by them at the MGM with Carol Channing, and you couldn't ask for a more appreciative audience than Carol. She was in seventh heaven. We had this little child running around in front of us, though, shrieking, jumping, and playing, and evidently the child's mother was one of the dancers in the show—not in *A Chorus Line*, but in *Hello, Hollywood*. She was married to another one who was in *A Chorus Line*. I'll never forget she came up to Carol in the booth after the show and thanked her for coming. Carol Channing said, "Well, you're welcome darling. You need to know something. Bringing a child that young to a show like this is a mistake because the child distracts the actors on the stage, the child distracts the viewers of the show, and, more importantly, you're teaching this child that theater equates with boredom, and you don't want to do that with a child." The woman was devastated, but it was excellent advice.

They were involved in all kinds of projects. A couple of the ex *Hello, Hollywood* people now are still in town. They help with high school musicals when they stage them. They're everywhere. I mean, we've got ex *Hello, Hollywood*, *Hello* dancers... Beth Macmillan, the head of Artown, was a dancer for *Hello, Hollywood*. We've got an assistant deputy, a buyer for Macy's, and the head of the hotel desk at Harrah's Reno. They're all over the place. Michael Eardley runs his own recording studio. Running into them is always fun. Those are the dancers.

The others, are involved in theater. They're involved in musical projects like the Reno Jazz Orchestra, which are very much populated by these performers. Yes, there is big community influence, I think. We've been blessed to have them. I wish we could have them back.

Why did the house bands go by the wayside?

It was too expensive. Tastes changed too. A couple of major things happened. When the casinos stopped being under the ownership of one or two people and when Bill Harrah's operation became the Holiday Inn and then later all the corporations that have owned it—Harrah's World and now Caesar's... when the single owners or the family owners, like the Smiths, sold off their properties, it became about the bottom line, and in came what a lot of people in the business call the bean counters. "So how much is the showroom costing us? Can we book somebody in? Let's sell at this price. We can break even at here. We can make more money here." I think mostly they're still cost losers. They bring people in and they hope for the money in the casino.

Back then, Bill Harrah, for instance, never did a bottom line on his showroom. He wanted that star in the showroom because he loved entertainment and he wanted the glamour. It was different to go to a casino when the marquee had the current hot television star of the time on the poster, Sammy [Davis, Jr.], or one of these people. It was a different atmosphere. Even if you went to the show or didn't go to the show, it was a different atmosphere.

The other thing that happened is that the feeder areas into Reno—Sacramento and San Francisco-- started having their own venues. You could have Sinatra here, but he might also be playing an amphitheater or an arena

in the Sacramento area, and in the old days they didn't have it. The only place outside of the Venetian Room at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco where you would go to see these people would have to be Reno, Vegas, or Tahoe. That's where they played.

I'm reading a biography of Danny Kaye right now. Back in those days, if you wanted to see Danny Kaye outside of a touring Broadway show, you went to the Sahara Tahoe, because you would never see him perform in Sac. The entertainers, themselves, if they made more money doing one show to eleven thousand people in an arena, would think why do fourteen shows a night and wear yourself out? All of that happened and all of that hurt the business.

The Nugget and the Eldorado are the only two still largely family-owned operations I can think of in northern Nevada. The Nugget has cut back on entertainment a lot, although they're increasing a little bit more now. The Eldorado has had their revues in the showroom, and they spend a lot of money on them. It's all changed, though.

In our last interview, you mentioned that lounge acts are not around anymore.

They're not around anymore. There were two tiers of performers: there were the headliners and there were the cabaret performers. Harrah's Reno and Harrah's Tahoe each had a 250-seat cabaret. The Nugget had a cabaret for a long time that was around 200 seats. The Sahara Tahoe had cabarets. The only one that's still operational from the old days is the Golden Cabaret in the Horizon Hotel Casino, and it has seen better days. It's there though, and it's running.

The cabarets had revues. Some very famous revue producers came to Reno. Frederic Apcar was probably the most famous

who came in. They would put together casts of, say, sixteen women dancers, four male dancers, a small band, and a couple of variety acts. They would have these production numbers and everything else on these small stages. They were smaller stages than the headliner room, but beautiful stages.

There were a couple of very legendary shows that were here all the time. *Bottoms Up*, a kind of *Hellzapappin* comedy revue that always starred Breck Wall, who is now gone, but was a wonderful performer.

Frisco Follies, which was, believe it or not, a drag show back in the 1970s, with a lead, Jamie James. There would be four magnificent drag queens and two women dancers, and the challenge was always to tell which one was which. Jamie would always open the show with coming out as a man, and then sit down at this big makeup table and start singing "I Enjoy Being a Girl," while starting to put on his makeup, his wig, and his gown. It was a beautiful transformation. The audience just sat amazed, and they loved the show. This was blue-nosed Reno.

I remember traveling all the way to Wendover one time to see a drag show, and I thought, "Why do they have a drag show in a casino in Wendover?" I went out with the cast to a bus stop afterward to have a late dinner, and here were all these lavishly dressed drag queens, and the truck drivers would come in and they were old friends. I mean, they were totally accepting of it. The cabarets had those.

They also had performers like Paul Revere and the Raiders, who were very big in the cabarets... Bill Medley of the Righteous Brothers and B.B. King. You could go hear B.B. King play for five dollars and a two-drink minimum.

They would get people also kind of on the decline and on the rise up. They had 1950s rock idols like Johnny Tillotson and Fabian in

the cabarets, or they would get somebody who was just coming up. They thought, "Snag them and then we'll get them for the main room." It could be somebody who was coming down but then coming up.

They booked Kenny Rogers one time because his career was pretty much over, and he was playing in the cabaret. Then the week before he showed up to do his engagement, he released "Lucille," and he was huge. They had huge lines to get in, but he fulfilled his contract. He was there, he was a professional, and that's what he did.

There were rock acts that were unique to the cabaret. A guy named Joe Savage was immensely popular. People built their own followings. The cabaret had a maître d' and a seating policy and all of that. Back in those days, of course, there was smoking. So you really had the cabaret smoky atmosphere from the 1930s Berlin cabarets sometimes.

Harolds Club had a little room on the second floor in the corner that seated seventy people called the Silver Dollar Room. They would have entertainers there like Earl "Fatha" Hines on the piano, Helen Forrest, the vocalist, and the Harry James Orchestra. They had a trio called the Wally Jones Trio. Wally is still with us—a great musician. He played piano, and there was a bass and drums, and they backed up all of these stars. You got in there for five dollars and two drinks, and you listened to Helen Forrest sing those standard big hits. You're too young to remember Helen Forrest, but Helen Forrest was a great lady.

Those were the cabarets, and they were open seven nights a week. They would have an entertainer followed by a revue, followed by the entertainer, followed by the revue. They usually started about eight-o'clock at night. They got over about two o'clock in the morning, and they had steady entertainment with successive seatings.

Then the entertainers from the headliner room or the big room would frequently pop up in the cabaret to see somebody perform, and so the audience got a chance to see them in person as well. Not here, but in Vegas is where Don Rickles got his big start because he was the comedian in the Casbah Lounge at the Sahara. Sinatra was in a main room, and Sinatra would show up to see him. Don very famously said, "Oh, Frank Sinatra is in the room. Frank, make everybody feel at home. Hit somebody." They thought, "He's going to die," but Sinatra found it to be hysterically funny and they became friends. Rickles became a star. So that was pretty cool.

Wayne Newton got his start performing with his brothers. They would do five shows a night up at Harvey's Wagon Wheel on a little stage up over the bar. That was the worst. You would be performing out...the Peppermill still has that. You're on a stage and the bar is down below; you're performing out to the casino, and frequently nobody is paying attention to you. That was the worst. Wayne Newton and his brothers would be up there blasting out into nothingness, five shows a night.

I had friends who used to play the old Ormsby House in Carson City, and they performed on a little stage. They'll never forget Danny singing "Shenandoah" one night, beautifully, and this guy comes on the stage with a ladder and climbs up to change a light bulb in the Keno board. [laughs] There was no respect. You were there for atmosphere.

How have cabaret shows changed over the years?

Well, there aren't any cabarets. There is only one. They're open lounges now. The Nugget cabaret used to be enclosed. They

had magic revues and dancing revues. Greg Thompson got his start there, bringing in Good Time Follies, Follies 1989 or Follies 1979, and production shows. Natalie Cole did her first professional engagement in that room when nobody knew anything other than her father.

Now it is two bands alternately playing out over into the casino. That's the case at the Atlantis, at Harrah's, and at the Lake. There just aren't any enclosed rooms. They used to have one at Caesar's Tahoe, one at Harrah's Tahoe, one at the Sahara Tahoe, and one at Harvey's. Harvey's still has their enclosed room, but it's the Improv. We used to have one at Harrah's Reno and one at the MGM.

When the MGM opened, it was a big thing. That was 1978. That changed Reno. It was huge. As you walked through the main door, there was a cocktail area called The Cub Bar. Everything was named after a lion. There was a piano player in the corner providing music to have drinks by. That was Lee Greenwood who was sitting there starting his career back then.

If you went out into the casino you came into the Lion's Den, which was the enclosed cabaret. That was the home for a long time of Miss Pat Collins, the hip hypnotist, who was just wonderful. She was there a lot. Then there was the Ziegfeld Room, as they called it then, the 2,000-seat theater.

It didn't open with *Hello, Hollywood*; it opened in 1978 with Dean Martin, because Dean Martin was the good luck charm of Kirk Kerkorian, who owned the operation. He always had different things. Kirk, for a while, owned the Cal-Neva Lodge on the north shore of the Lake, and he operated that showroom up there with Barry Ashton shows. Dean Martin opened at the MGM for him, though. Dean Martin was followed by a week of Mac Davis and Joan Rivers. There is a combination

for you. Then it closed down to get ready for *Hello, Hollywood*.

That was 1978. That was the year that the Sahara Reno opened, which is now the Montage condos. The Sahara was the Reno Hilton, then the Flamingo Hilton, then the Golden Phoenix. That was the year also that Circus Circus opened. You had three big major openings, and that was the same year Charlie Mapes opened a club called The Money Tree because everybody was flush, everything was going fine, and Reno was on the road. Of course, bad times come eventually.

The only major operation to open after that was the Silver Legacy, and I'd have to look up the date that they opened. They're a joint operation between Mandalay Bay, who owns Circus, and the Caranos, who own the Eldorado. That's why they're all connected with the skyway.

Were people in Reno outside of the casino industry excited about all of this growth?

Oh, yes. It was a big thing. The MGM was the biggest, because it showed a faith in the community that no other major operator had shown since Harrah. It was a massive elegant hotel, with a major showroom, and a revue people flew from the around the world to see. *Hello, Hollywood, Hello* was a big attraction. I mean, where else on stage could you have the San Francisco earthquake recreated with buildings falling and fires going on, have an outer-space sequence, have people come toward the audience on the wings of an airplane, have a cast of 150 people, an extended circus number, and recreate the San Francisco Nob Hill atmosphere with Peacock Court and the Golden Gate Park at the turn of the century? Rain curtains, cascades, horses, a lion... I mean, it was something to come to Reno to see.

The community was proud of MGM, too, because we had an MGM. You'd see Academy Awards for MGM displayed in a glass case. You'd have posters for their big movies in cases as you walked down the hallway. You had a glittering red carpeted staircase going down underneath a huge chandelier. You had a fifty-lane bowling alley, and back then you also had a jai alai fronton, because jai alai was very big in Florida and in Vegas. They brought it into Reno, but it never really caught on, but we did have jai alai at one time.

The lake outside of the MGM, now the Grand Sierra, was filled from groundwater excavation. There is a long story to that, but I don't know it. Their original idea was that they were going to bring the original *Bounty* from *Mutiny on the Bounty*, 1935 MGM production and set it afloat on this lake and turn it into a restaurant so you could dine on the original *Bounty*. It was a brilliant idea, but they couldn't get it up here. There was no truck that could handle it. They weren't going to be able to go through any overheads. It was a logistical nightmare. They even suggested, at one time, airlifting it with helicopters and flying it up, but the FAA wouldn't allow that. They didn't want a flying eighteenth-century sailing ship coming over the Sierras. So they didn't do it.

I don't know exactly how the driving range came about. I remember hearing one time it was accidental. It was groundwater coming up from construction. It was either that or it was originally intended, but they were going to have that be part of the whole attraction. They wound up opening an oyster bar called The Bounty inside instead. [laughs]

They also had the most elegant restaurant Reno had ever seen up to then; it was called Café Gigi. Many of the walls and things were from the MGM 1930's production of *Marie*

Antoinette, and when you went in there, that was elegant. Everything was *a la carte*. Reno was not used to *a la carte*, believe me. They wanted a steak, they wanted to have potatoes and beans with it, and if they had to pay four dollars extra for the potato and three dollars extra for the beans, they got pissed off. It was a place to take people, though, and it had these private dining booths where the curtains would close.

I had a lot of meals there with Carol Channing when she was in *Hello, Hollywood*, *Hello*, although Carol was hyperallergenic, and she couldn't eat food or drink water that didn't come from a special source. She had all these sterling silver containers with "C.C." inscribed on the top of them, and she would screw off the top and there would be these square-looking dry meat things in there. She would always pay a lot of attention to what you were eating because she had to eat this bland stuff, and she'd just say, "Oh, that must taste good. What is that?" It was just wonderful.

The Gigi was a great restaurant. They had a great Chinese restaurant called The China Seas. They had their coffee shop and they had a buffeteria. They had Caruso's, which was their Italian restaurant, which is now Charlie Palmer. That whole Charlie Palmer stretch was The China Seas and Caruso's originally. So, yes, Reno was exciting.

What was Reno and Tahoe's reputation in terms of entertainment?

Well, everybody thought Reno was scandalous. In the old days, they thought everybody had to be connected with gambling in Reno. I remember talking to a person in Chicago one time, who was astounded that I taught school in Reno because he didn't think there were any schools in Reno. They were totally unaware of the community as a community, mostly.

If you went further east, some people still thought we rode horses. I mean, that was it. A lot of people thought we were right next door to Vegas. "We're going to be in Vegas. Can you hop over?"

I said, "Yeah, but it is 480 miles, so I don't think so." They thought we were practically a suburb of Vegas. A lot of people don't understand that Reno was much bigger than Vegas at one time, not size-wise, but it was a bigger entertainment mecca. Vegas came along a little bit later. Actually, Elko was the first place that had major stars playing in the casinos.

Reno in the 1970s and 1980s...let's say from 1965 on. They opened the headliner room at Harrah's Reno in 1965, and it was a mecca for entertainers because of Bill Harrah. Bill Harrah treated them wonderfully.

I talked to Doc Severinsen two weeks ago. Doc Severinsen was the leader of *The Tonight Show* band, and he said when he played Harrah's, Bill Harrah gave him a Rolls-Royce to drive around town in. He said he went out and turned the key, and he didn't think anything happened, so he went back in. He said, "I don't want to hurt it, but I don't think it started."

The guy came out and said, "No, it is running. It is a Rolls. Now you know it's running."

Bill Cosby was an opening comedian and they gave him a red Cadillac convertible, and he went to the entertainment director and he said, "I don't know if you're aware of this," this was in the 1960s, "but there's a certain stereotype to black men and red convertibles, and I don't want to drive around being a stereotype."

They said, "Well, we'll take that car back and give you another one. What would you like?"

He said, "Oh, make it a Ferrari." He went up to the hotel room with his wife, and there

was a knock on the door, and the guy handed him keys and said, "You can drive a stick, can't you?" It was to a Ferrari. Much to Bill Harrah's wit, Cosby said, "It was red. He made sure it was red."

If you were booked at Harrah's, you had made it in live entertainment, seriously. They were very strict. The show started at 8:00 o'clock, didn't start at 8:01. They got out at 9:30. They didn't get out at 9:35. People had to get out in the casinos.

On opening night, the entertainment director was sitting in the audience with a phone, and about fifteen seconds before 8:00, he would dial and the lights would start to come down and they would say, "Ladies and gentlemen, Harrah's is proud to present," and the curtain would go up. If the entertainer was not ready, the curtain went up anyway. They didn't wait for anybody. They fired more opening acts because they didn't get there on time. [laughs] They were very strictly run.

Can you tell me about Reno's ability to draw big-name performers and if that has changed at all over the years.

Well, you could still draw big-name entertainers here if you were willing to pay them the price. There is the Reno Events Center which will seat ten to eleven thousand, I think. They've had everybody from Elton John to Aerosmith there, so you can do the special concerts and you can sell them out. Van Halen was there, and Santana is coming up. You're in competition with the rest of the entertainment tour world, though.

What Reno does now is frequently they'll snag somebody en route. If an entertainer has a show in Salt Lake City and one in Sacramento, and they've got a couple of days in between, they'll grab them, or if they are

on the way to San Francisco, they will add to their tour totals.

The problem is booking...I'll probably get in trouble with this, but booking the downtown events center is a joint effort with a group that involves the Circus Circus, Silver Legacy, Eldorado and Harrah's Reno, and any one of those can put the kibosh on anybody else. I know in the past that they've proposed everybody from Bruce Springsteen's Acoustic Tour to Pearl Jam, and a casino has turned it down saying it is not their demographic. They were going to get Neil Diamond...not our demographic. What they are really saying is, "No, we don't want to spend that money."

Could Reno have major entertainment? You're doggone right. They can have it a lot. The Asian concert business is very big in Reno. They bring over buses of people from San Francisco and Sacramento for Asian concerts that we don't even know about. There was a New Year's concert this last year that brought over fifty-six buses of people, and most of Reno is not even aware of it because they don't know who these singers are. They're Cantonese, Hong Kong stars, but they're very big. So yes, Reno could do it.

The Grand Sierra brings in some very good entertainers, sometimes pretty astonishing entertainers. Artown, I think, is wonderful. The Artown Encore Series, which last year gave us Steve Martin and his Bluegrass Banjo Band, Bernadette Peters, John Lithgow, Arlo Guthrie, and Ailey II Dance Company... those are wonderful performers. So they crop up. I don't think people need die for lack of entertainment in Reno. You just don't have it seven nights a week, two shows a night anymore. You can't go to a dinner show on Tuesday night anymore.

Has the purpose behind having casino entertainment changed at all?

No, it is still to draw people in and it is still to add a certain kind of atmosphere. It's always better to have an operating showroom than to have one that is dead. So Harrah's Reno now, for instance, is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bill Harrah this year, and they have a show in their headliner room of Sammy Davis. Sammy's obviously no longer with us. He is being impersonated by David Hayes, who is a terrific Sammy Davis impersonator. It's done with an excellent band with good players, and it recreates the Sammy Davis showroom experience as close as they can.

That adds a great deal of allure, but ultimately, when it comes to tribute acts, they're not the act. You're not seeing Sammy Davis. You're seeing somebody who does a damn good Sammy Davis, but there is a big difference between that and having had Sammy in that showroom.

There are more tribute acts out now than practically there are bands. There is The Eagles tribute band, The Blues Brothers tribute band, the Aerosmith tribute band, AC/Dshe—that one cracks me up—a female AC/DC band. All these tribute bands—Cashed Out, Johnny Cash or Super Diamond, Neil Diamond—are good but they're not the real thing. They're affordable, because if you're going to go see Neil Diamond on one of his tours, you're going to be paying probably a \$60 to \$150 a ticket, and if you go see Super Diamond, you're paying \$15. A lot of people can afford it who can't afford the real deal.

Prices are just incredibly high, and the economy is not good. Harvey's Outdoor this year has Alison Krauss, Miranda Lambert, Diana Krall, Phish, and Lady Antebellum. All these have top ticket prices of around \$125. If you do down to Vegas and want to see a Cirque show, you're going to be paying around \$200 to have any kind of decent seat. If you

want to see Celine Dion, meet her, have a top seat, and get a VIP ticket, it will only cost you \$1,750.

Oh, that's all? [laughs]

And \$485 for Donny and Marie. [laughs] I've known Donny and Marie for years. I couldn't imagine paying \$485, but that's where we are. That is where Vegas is. Reno is less expensive, but Reno's been hit by the economy.

The major hit has been Indian gaming. People don't want to drive 120 miles to 130 miles from Sacramento when they can drive 30 miles and get off at Jackson or up toward Placerville and go to a big casino there. That is the gambling market.

I always thought it was a big mistake to allow gambling to go into New Jersey because everybody knew back then that it was just going to proliferate across the country and Nevada would wind up being hurt. There was a long time where we were unique and people came here for that reason. We were very sinful, with twenty-four-hour drinking and legalized prostitution in some counties. I thought it was wonderful. Not that I patronized legalized prostitution, but I just thought the whole atmosphere was wonderful. People back in the old days would say, "Oh, it's such a naughty state."

What is it about Reno that we can't get major headliners to move here?

We could get it, but we won't. If all of the casinos got together and decided they would use a venue to have a major star that would perform only in Reno, and it was the only place you could see them, it would go very well.

You have to remember that Celine Dion is playing Caesar's Palace, which is part of

the Harrah's operation. The Rio, Caesar's, Imperial Palace, Paris—they're all Caesar's. So they're doing it down there, but will they do it up here? No, because they don't see the city as having that kind of allure. I've always said that if the casinos got together and built a venue that would be the only place certain performers could play—you only see them there—it would help boost Reno tremendously. If they did one big, slam—bam production show that was not a Cirque—there are too many Cirques—and people came to see this one special show and the only place you could see it was Reno, it would be a big benefit. Grandiose ideas that nobody will buy.

I always wish I had unlimited funds. If I had unlimited funds, the first thing I would do is build Reno a theater complex with a legitimate theater with capabilities far beyond the Pioneer [Center for the Performing Arts], a concert hall (there is a nice one up at the university with Nightingale Hall) and a huge venue and arena. It would be of great benefit to this city, but I don't have unlimited funds. A few bucks left over every month. [laughs]

Are there other things besides needing a decent venue that are affecting Reno?

Well, the showroom at the Grand Sierra is one of the best showrooms in the state, but it was built in 1978 and needs some significant upgrading. You have to remember that showrooms in Vegas were built for the shows. The Treasure Island built that showroom for *Mystère*. The Bellagio built that showroom for O. Caesar's built that showroom for Celine Dion and Elton John. They're big venues, and they were willing to put a lot of money into those venues. We're not willing to do that, mainly because a lot of the casinos today can't really afford to do it. They're just getting by.

Reno is no longer a major casino-industry city. It has to branch out into warehousing and other businesses. If it ever happens, it's going to be a long time before Reno becomes premier again when it comes to entertainment. People look at Reno now as being seedy. The younger generation isn't turned off by tattoo parlors, but the older generation is, and there are so many of them downtown, along with pawn shops, T-shirt shops, bars where fights break out, and empty storefronts.

There is no more depressing block in downtown Reno than walking from First Street to Second Street, across from what would be the west side where Woolworth's used to be and Lerner used to be. Now there is one hotel entrance, a tattoo parlor, and a wedding chapel. It's bleak. It's bleak, and people don't like that. They don't like to be panhandled downtown. They don't like the whole atmosphere of it being skuzzy. No matter what people do—the major casinos and other businesses—to downtown to keep it up, and they do a valiant effort, has that reputation. It's going to get worse if they don't do something major.

The whitewater park was a great idea, even though you've got morons down there now in the raging river putting their kids in on inner tubes, but the park was a great idea. Wingfield Park and that whole atmosphere is really cool. The Riverwalk is wonderful, as is Riverside Drive for bicyclists. I drive it every day, and there are bicyclists all the time on there. There are really good ideas, but they're not at that main core where people don't like to hang out, so they don't.

Can you tell me about downtown when it wasn't skuzzy?

Downtown Reno was very bright. When you drove over the hill from Sacramento

and you came in from Verdi and you saw the lights of Reno ahead of you, and it was glowing. There was a lot of neon. The main street was Virginia Street before the Eldorado. The Eldorado was the first one to build on the other side of the tracks. Everybody said the Eldorado wasn't going to make it because they built on the other side of the tracks—the north side of the track. Everything had to be on the south side of the tracks.

On that block—the south side of the tracks—there was the Mapes, which was much beloved by a lot of people in Reno. It got to be really rundown, but it was at one time very elegant. The Cal Neva was there. City Hall was a bank building. Harrah's, Nevada Club, Harolds, were all in that block, and across the street was Fitzgerald's, the Horseshoe, the Silver Spur, and the Little Nugget. These were all smaller casinos, but they all had restaurants and they were all inexpensive places to eat. Bob Cashell owned the Horseshoe Club.

I remember you would go in the Silver Spur, you'd have a full meal for two bucks. The sound of it was different because nothing was electronic. You heard clink, clink, kachunk, kachunk, kachunk, and when money spewed out, it dropped into this tin pan down below and you felt you really hit something. The highest paid jackpot was usually \$75 if you bet a quarter. It was raucous but it was bright. Even the Center Street side, which had the Palace Club, which was very bright and well lighted...I don't go all the way back to before then, but people loved walking from casino to casino and checking things out downtown. It was cool.

Riverside was across the river, kitty-corner from the Mapes, and that was a going concern. The Holiday Hotel, which is now the Sienna, had an open cabaret in there and they had a lot of good acts. You went there for cocktails in the evening and sat at a table drinking your

cocktails while a group called Charles Gould & His Satin Strings walked around playing violin.

You went up to North Tahoe and the North Shore Club would have acts like Liberace and his orchestra and the Kings Four. The Nevada Lodge would have entertainment. The Cal-Neva Lodge would have entertainment. That was a good area to walk around from casino to casino. Crystal Bay, all those there... South Shore, of course, was another, and it was all hopping.

Have there ever been fads in the types of performances or shows casinos had?

I think one of the major changes happened in the late 1970s when Harrah's decided to book into Tahoe a gentleman named Eddie Arnold, who was a country singer. He had a great number of what were called countrypolitan hits. Eddie Arnold was a big star, but he was a country star, and casinos didn't have country stars. Casinos had urban singers. It was a big, bold move on the part of Harrah's to book in Eddie Arnold. He wore a tuxedo and he had an orchestra. He didn't come out in Nashville glitter, but he was country and he was a hit, and it became okay to book Nashville glitter. Roy Clark, Mel Tillis, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, and George Jones—all those people followed. That was a big change. You could have country stars in the main room. I remember that, and it became pretty trendy to have them, actually, because they had extremely dedicated audiences.

Magic hit up here, not as big as it did in Las Vegas, but it hit up here. David Copperfield was actually an opening act for a mime duo named Shields and Yarnell back in the late 1970s, and then he started playing up here a good deal. We had a magic

revue called *Spellbound*, which played several shows. Magicians had shows in the lounges. They were specialty acts in things like *Hello, Hollywood* and Fredric Apcar shows. Magic was very popular for a while, but it was never as big as it was in Vegas.

Comedy clubs became very inexpensive ways to have shows, and the only one around... well, they're two now: Catch a Rising Star at the Legacy and Improv at Harvey's. There was a big trend on comedy for a while.

The topless revues were very big, so to speak, and people had a good time at them. Now when you turn on Cinemax, it doesn't mean anything. Back in the 1970s that was a big deal, man. You went out to a topless revue, you went [demonstrates] nudge, nudge, giggle, giggle, snort. It was pretty innocent, but they were big.

Hello, Hollywood was topless. Most of the women of *Hello, Hollywood* didn't wear tops. They had a covered show for dinner on Sundays, where you could take the kids. One night a friend of mine, who was one of the tall nudes, forgot that it was the dinner show on Sunday and walked out in her usual lack of costume, much to the delight of every fourteen-year-old boy in the audience. [laughs] She was reprimanded, but I thought it was funny.

Besides Harrah's taking the initiative to book a country western singer, were there any other shifts in terms of booking performances?

No. I think everything is so eclectic these days that you have audiences for country, you have audiences for urban. You try to book them all.

Let's take the Silver Legacy, for example. I've gone to several shows there lately, and this coming weekend they have The Front Men, who are three wonderful guys who

sang leads for *Restless Heart*, *Little Texas*, and *Lone Star*. Then a few weeks ago I went to see James Blunt. James Blunt sold out 20,000 seats in Casablanca, and here he is in the Silver Legacy.

They'll do what they can when they can to get people in, but audiences are very diverse. I could take a friend of mine to see Daniel Tosh and he wouldn't know who the hell he is. I think Daniel Tosh is one of the funniest people I've ever seen in my life, and in live performance he's an absolute god-given joy, but I could take almost any of my friends and they would have no idea who he is. I could take some of my former students to see Kenny Rogers; they wouldn't know who he is.

It's all so diverse, and it all depends on what television channel you watch and what demographic you fit in for whether or not you think George Lopez is the funniest guy in the world or you just can't stand him. That was all pretty much the case forever, but what hurt is that television used to have variety shows in the 1950s and 1960s, and they had guest stars. Those people came to Reno. So, Red Skelton, Glen Campbell... Jackie Gleason was never here, but *The Andy Williams Show*, for instance, was and every evening they would have a special guest singer. *Dinah Shore Show*... these people would come to Reno, and you had variety acts and people knew the variety acts. Ed Sullivan introduced more variety acts than any human being in history, and if you were on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, America saw you. If you were here on the marquee, people said, "Oh, we saw him on *Ed Sullivan*. Let's go."

Now when you have five hundred channels, who is watching anything? It all becomes a smaller demographic. Skelton was watched by millions of people every week. There isn't anybody now that has that kind of show anymore. Every time they try to revive

it, it bombs, and that was your reservoir of talent. Somebody told me the other day you can't get a job in Las Vegas anymore unless you're a Russian contortionist. [laughs]

Can you talk about non-casino-related events in Reno that you've covered?

Artown, of course, is major. I think Reno Philharmonic is brilliant. Laura Jackson's a great conductor and she does wonderful things. Any orchestra that stays above their heads and winds up in the black in America these days is pretty extraordinary, especially when you've got major symphonies declaring bankruptcy across the country. The audience and the demographic for classical music is older, and there doesn't seem to be much of a younger generation coming up for that. That's too bad.

Somewhat casino-related but definitely civic is Hot August Nights. A friend of mine refers to as the festival of "Look What I Have and You Don't," which is a bunch of people showing off their classic cars. A lot of people enjoy it, though, and it's a big attraction. It is definitely Reno.

All the street festivals seem to be sponsored by casinos. I think the Italian Street Festival is one of the best. Barbecue, Brews, and Blues is another one with really good stuff going on on the streets. The Best of the West Nugget Rib Cook-Off... those are all casino-related.

Bruka Theatre downtown is a cool little theater. I wish they did a little bit more classical drama mixed in, but you go in there, sit in sofas, and enjoy some pretty cool theater. I think Bruka is pretty nice. There is another company downtown called Good Luck MacBeth Theater that's doing some nice things. There always seem to be theater people out there looking for places to do their stuff, and they do a pretty good job, by and large.

Reno is not a cultural mecca, but we have a lot more than a lot of people think.

Artown is a brilliant idea. There isn't any other city that I know that has thirty-one days of free entertainment, some paid events but mostly free, a lot of children's discovery things and evenings that are just fun. I'm going to go to Rolling on the River Friday night to hear some rock and roll and then stick around with some friends and watch *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. That is my favorite Indie movie. I can quote every line of it, but I'll probably sit and watch the whole thing again. I've got it on DVD.

Since you have covered Artown over the years, what changes or developments have you seen?

Well, they're getting more strapped for funds too. Artown in a few previous years would always have some pretty major... take dance, for instance. They had the San Francisco Ballet, the Joffrey Ballet, and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Now they have a thing called Underland, which has got a great reputation. It'll probably be excellent, but it is eighteen and over, and most people haven't heard of them. They had the Mormon Tabernacle Choir one year, Mandy Patinkin, and Marcel Marceau. Now their biggest star is Doc Severinsen. So they've been strapped for funds as well. It used to be always very exciting to see who was coming for Artown, and the last couple of years has been not as exciting. For families to get out there, though...

Monday night I went to Bartley Ranch and I heard the bank Pink Martini and the March Fourth Marching Band. It was one of the most wonderful evenings of music I've ever had because they're both just incredible groups. Everybody was happy. I just think that's neat. Everybody's outdoors, everybody's having a good time, and everybody's friendly

and courteous, except for the two women sitting next to me who seemed to be far more interested in seeing if anybody had texted them than watch. I think they should be banned in movie theaters and I think they should be banned in live concerts.

Any favorite shows, casino- or non-casino-related, that you remember seeing?

I think that my most valued moments have been the times that I've had the opportunity to go backstage and to spend time with people who have made a difference and have helped influence entertainment in this country and in the world. When I was growing up in Mile City, Montana, I used to imagine seeing people that I would see in the movies, and I used to imagine going to showrooms like the ones you would see in the movies, where the maître d' would seat people at tables and then there would be a floor show. I've been given that opportunity, which I think is wonderful.

I have really outstanding memories of being backstage. I remember spending quite a bit of time with Liberace, who was one of the nicest people I've ever known. Red Skelton was wonderful. Mitzi Gaynor was wonderful. Juliet Prowse was wonderful.

I've had dinner with or been backstage with practically everybody, and I don't invite myself backstage. I have to be invited back. They all know who I am, and that just tickles me. I think just being comfortable with entertainers is one of my blessings.

JOAN SHONNARD

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Joan Shonnard: I was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and grew up there. I did not leave until my husband and I left in 1952 to go to Detroit, Michigan, where he was to serve a residency in vascular and general surgery.

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

My mother was a homemaker. My father had a retail and wholesale paint store similar to the Paint Mart here in town. They were both born in Louisville, Kentucky, and lived there all their lives.

Had your father started his paint store on his own?

That's correct. In fact, he had started it in the early part of the Depression. I considered him quite a successful businessman to have started a business in the early thirties.

Was Detroit a culture shock for you when you moved there, having been in Louisville for your whole life up to that point?

Definitely. Detroit was in the throes of a cultural change. Many colored people had moved from the South into the central part of the city where Henry Ford Hospital was located.

Is that where your husband had his residency?

That's correct.

How did you meet your husband?

I met my husband at the university when we were both students.

What was Louisville like when you were younger?

It was a town of I would say 500,000 people, so it was considerably smaller than

it is now. Of course, it is located right on the Ohio River. That was part of growing up—learning how to boat on the Ohio.

What kind of boats were you using?

We used canoes, rowboats, motorboats, but mostly water-ski boats.

Was it for fun?

Oh definitely for fun.

Was there a lot of shipping or commerce related to the river?

Yes, and at that time in the center of the city a lot of the boat docks were industrial. Recreation took place mostly to the west or to the east of the city itself.

Do you remember what schools you attended while you were growing up?

I went to St. Agnes Parochial School for the first through the eighth grade. Then I went to Sacred Heart Academy, an all-girls' school, from my freshman through the senior years of high school. I attended the University of Louisville until I got my degree. I was a fine arts major.

What sort of classes were you taking as a part of your major?

We took a fine arts history course, which I had to take for the whole four years of school. Then we had art classes, where we painted, drew, and sculpted. We went through all of the media that one associates with fine arts.

Was there a class that you particularly liked while you were working on your major?

I did particularly enjoy drawing from life, and I particularly enjoyed the painting classes. We would often go out and paint, which I find very pleasurable.

Who were the people that made up the faculty that you were taking classes from?

I remember in particular a German man who was head of the Art Department, who came over because of Hitler. Other than that, the faculty was from the United States. I don't recall whether they were local or whether they were from the U.S. of A. I do recall a particular woman from whom I enjoyed taking art classes, but now I don't recall her name.

Prior to going to the university and studying fine arts there, growing up, what sort of cultural things do you remember being exposed to?

I particularly enjoyed summer nights at Churchill Downs. They brought in various artists from around the country. I particularly recall Benny Goodman. He played a few jazz pieces, but it was mostly classical. The series was mostly classical and was, as I said, in the summertime and it was out at Churchill Downs, which was quite pleasant. During the racing season, Churchill Downs was in full flower. I had family members who had a box at the Downs, and we would always go out and bet on the races. [laughs]

Were you successful at betting on the races?

Generally not. [laughs]

Was your time at University of Louisville when you got involved in painting, or did you get involved earlier?

I must have begun drawing when I was three or four years old, and I continued to do so on my own and in classes. In particular, in high school we had an active art program in which I participated.

What is it you enjoy about painting?

Well, just the whole experience. I enjoy looking at people and trying to reproduce their likeness. I enjoy looking at a scene and trying to reproduce it. It gets to be quite a challenge. I have dabbled in different kinds of painting, especially when I was younger. After the family came, I found it easiest to take watercolor paints with me, and certainly little ones getting into oil paints would make a huge mess. With watercolor, you could always wash it off. I then became enamored of watercolor and decided that that would be my chief medium, and that's what I have remained with.

In terms of style and technique, how does watercolor differ from other mediums of paint?

It's very unforgiving. One must plot in one's head exactly how and when one is going to apply the paint. You have to take into consideration factors such as drying time. Color, as it dries, changes mostly in value. All those things have to be thought out ahead of time.

In terms of the amount of time it takes you to work on a piece, is it appreciably longer or shorter than other styles of painting?

I can't discourse on oil, because it's been so long since I've used it, but pastels would compare favorably with watercolor in terms of time to complete a painting.

For one of the portraits that you've done, about how long would you say a painting like that takes?

A portrait, I would say, takes six to eight hours.

Do you do that all in one sitting?

I paint a little and come back generally. Even when I'm outside painting, I don't complete a painting on site. I tend to bring it back, look at it, stay away from it a day or two, and then get back to it. That's the way I work.

Are there certain things that you enjoy painting more than others?

Well, portraiture, for one. Then I enjoy landscape. I don't necessarily like still life. It doesn't present that much of a challenge to me somehow. Other people do find still life very challenging, but it certainly is not my cup of tea.

Are there particular landscapes locally that you've spent time painting?

Washoe Lake. Other than that, I can't think of anything that I continually go back to.

Do you have any sense about what it is about Washoe Lake that keeps bringing you back?

It's the feature of the lake itself and the view of Slide Mountain across the water from the east side of the lake.

In terms of difficulty, are there differences between landscapes and portraits? Is it apples and oranges?

Well, I wouldn't say it is apples and oranges. I wouldn't say one is more difficult than the other. I think it's just a preference. I prefer to do portraits, and in that sense, perhaps portraits are easier just because I like them. We have a group that meets every week, so when I can't get out.... For instance, when the weather is like it is now, why, I am definitely going to paint a painting because I'm going to the Portrait Workshop.

The Portrait Workshop has been meeting weekly for over fifty years, so it's definitely a cultural feature here in town. We currently meet at the rear of Nevada Fine Arts. We have met in many different venues, sometimes up at the university. Prior to where we are now, we painted at a little house in back of the Wildflower Village. Prior to that, we painted down at McKinley Park School.

What does a meeting consist of?

We don't have a meeting. This is a workshop, so we're all painting. Some people paint with oil. Some people paint with watercolor. Some people use pastels, charcoal, or pencil. It's all whatever your preference is—whatever medium you want to work in.

Is there one subject that you're all painting together?

Yes, we have a model. these paintings that you see are all from life. They're all different people who have posed for us. We're all sitting around doing our own thing, looking at the model, trying to reproduce the model.

Have you been involved since the beginning?

No, it was going before I moved into town.

How did you get involved with it?

I simply went. Anyone is invited to join us. We simply pay a \$10 model fee. Each individual pays \$10 that goes toward paying the model. Somehow, when I arrived in town, I heard about it. We moved to town in 1965 and I started going to Portrait Workshop in 1966.

In addition to doing the portraiture at these workshops that you have every week, are there other activities that the group does?

The Latimer Art Club for outdoor painting during the summer months.

Is Latimer Art Club related to the portrait group?

No. There could be some people from the portrait group who go to the Latimer Art Club, and vice versa.

Who are the people that attend the Portrait Workshop?

They're just all different kinds of people from all different walks of life, male and female. There are some of us who are steady goers, and then there are some people who drop in every once in a while.

In terms of the general participation, has that changed over the years?

No, it's always been a varied group—varied in age, varied in occupation, varied in parts of the city where people live. In fact, we have some people who come from as far away as Carson City and Gardnerville.

Has the amount of people that are coming to the workshops grown over the years?

It varies. When we were meeting in back of that place down on Fourth Street—in the

small house—we couldn't accommodate more than about eight people. Now at the Nevada Fine Arts, we've had as many as fifteen.

Do you ever have exhibits of the work that you're doing with the portrait group?

Yes. In fact, we're having an exhibit right now at Scenic Nevada, which is the bottom of the Museum Tower Building. All the artists are exhibiting four paintings each.

Can you tell me about the pieces that you've exhibited?

Well, the theme of the exhibit is Cowboys and Showgirls, so I have a painting of a cowboy in there. I have a painting of a man not related to cowboys or the cowgirl. He's in a Civil War uniform on the Confederate side. There is a society here in town where the women wear dresses from that period, and the men wear uniforms from either the North or the South side. This gentleman has a Confederate uniform and he's wearing that. Then I have another portrait of just a man who is an acquaintance of one of the artists.

The portraits that you have exhibited, are all of these of people that have modeled for the workshop?

Yes, because that's what the exhibit is—paintings by painters from the Portrait Workshop.

How do you find models every week?

We have one woman, Renate Neuman, who is quite adept at finding people. She is wonderful. She mostly finds our models.

Is there ever a theme to the models that you have posing, or is that just whoever you can get in?

Whoever. Well, actually, we had showgirls at one time. There was a show put on from Las Vegas of showgirls, and so for about a month we painted nothing but showgirls. We then exhibited down at Vegas and exhibited up at the Historical Society here. That was within the last couple of years.

Do you remember how many pieces you exhibited at that particular exhibit?

Four.

Did you get kind of tired of showgirls after a while? [laughter]

Fortunately, they had varied costumes, so it wasn't easy to get tired of them.

When the Historical Society has different exhibits set up, is there a common number for how many pieces you exhibit?

No. Generally it depends upon the size of the room where we're exhibiting.

How was the Historical Society in terms of a venue for putting on an art exhibit?

Very nice. There's also a miniature show once a year and it's held up there. The pieces can't be larger than five-by-seven inches. They're very accommodating and seem to have a successful bunch of people coming up to see the show. It's generally a successful event.

What do you fit into a five-by-seven painting?

That's the challenge at the miniature show.

Do you remember any of the miniature pieces that you've done?

Well, there's one up there of the Truckee River.

Besides the fee that you pay every week for the model, is there any other financial need that you have or any fundraising that you have to do?

No. Of course, the fee that we pay each week goes for rent for the room and also for the model.

Is Nevada Fine Arts a nice venue to have the workshop every week?

Yes. Actually, it's the nicest up at the university. We can only be there on Friday, though, and we've been meeting on Wednesday for so many years, we hate to change. It would be ideal up there at the university, because the lighting is perfect.

How long are the workshops, generally, every week?

Start at nine in the morning and end at twelve-thirty.

Do you have enough time to do what you would consider a complete work?

Usually not. Usually I bring work home and finish it.

In our initial meeting, you had mentioned an exhibit that you all had done with the Reno Little Theater for a play.

Yes. *Harvey*. I believe *Harvey* was the rabbit, and *Oswald* was the main character.

We mostly did a painting of the main character with the rabbit somewhere around him. That's been years ago. That's when the Reno Little Theater was on Sierra Street. We displayed in that building while the play ran.

For the painting that you do, are you ever able to sell your portraits?

Yes, but very rarely. At the Portrait Workshop, usually right there, and whoever is posing will say, "I'd like that. I'd like to buy that from you. How much?" Generally, I charge \$100.

Are there memorable pieces that you've painted or ones that are favorites of yours?

Oh, naturally I do have favorites. Beyond that, I would have to go through them to pick out the ones that are my favorite. Of course, some of my favorites have sold.

Do you hate to let them go?

Generally, no. I do plenty of them, so I don't get that particularly attached.

How many pieces are you working on during any given week?

Oh, it varies. It varies a great deal. As I say, I generally finish one portrait a week. In the summertime I'll be out painting and I'll try to finish that.

What awards and honors have you received?

Mostly they're ribbons—first, second, third place, and then honorable mention.

You've entered pieces in different shows?

Yes.

Outside of the exhibits you've done with the Portrait Society, what other exhibits of your own work have appeared?

There's the miniature show. There are other shows at different times and different years that I've always entered. There's the gallery down in Carson City. I've had pieces in the gallery down there. It's a large space and it is run by the art group down in Carson City. I think they call it the King Street Gallery.

In terms of your own painting, have you ever had family members that have sat for a portrait or friends?

Yes.

Have you done multiple portraits with each child, or just one with them at a certain age?

Multiple portraits at different ages.

How did they react to having to sit there?

Actually, they figure they're going to have to do it, so they... I think once you get the first one through, then the others think, "Well, it's going to happen to me."

You mentioned that you came to Reno in 1965. Do you remember what brought you to Reno?

We lived in Anaconda, Montana, and my husband was practicing there. The miners went out on strike and nobody got sick because they couldn't afford it. He decided that he couldn't raise a family with such a sketchy inflow of money, so we looked around. We wanted to find a place that had a

university and that needed a general surgeon, so we settled on Reno.

Had you been to Reno at all prior to when you moved here?

I'm assuming I had been, because we love to travel.

What was Reno like when you first came here?

Reno was a town of about 66,000 people, if you can imagine that. It was quite a bit smaller than it is now, but the people were very welcoming. We enjoyed skiing. Slide Mountain is so very close here. We put the children in school right away.

Had you had all your children by the time you all moved to Reno?

Yes, the youngest was a year and a half when we moved here.

Was there much available when you came here in 1965?

For the first couple of years, it was a case of settling in, getting the children into the proper schools, and getting their schedules going. In other words, I didn't have much time for anything else. Then we decided to build a house, which we did. We moved into our new house in 1967, so that was a terrifically busy time for me. I didn't do anything but go to the Portrait Workshop. I'm trying to think when I started to do any outside... we had a doctors' wives' organization which I became active in. It was an easy way to meet people. Then I also, as time went on, volunteered to help with the Republican Party. Washoe Med had a hospital auxiliary, as did St. Mary's, which I became active in.

Were you surprised in any way by what you found in Reno as you were able to branch out and get involved?

I was delighted by what I found in Reno. Obviously I couldn't avail myself of a whole lot of different things, with a family to raise. I was very happy with what I found in Reno, though. With the university being here, there are many things that one can take advantage of that one doesn't have in a town without a university.

You mentioned that you came from Anaconda, Montana. What was Anaconda like?

It was a very small town of maybe 10,000 to 12,000 people. Reno was a big city compared to that. Of course, neither was the size of Louisville, and neither had as much to offer as Louisville did.

I know that you've been involved in a tour of artists' homes in the area. Can you tell me a little bit more about that and how you got involved with that?

Well, Toni Lowden, a friend of mine, decided to form a business to take people and conventioners, around to various spots and tourist attractions in the city. She thought that going to artists' studios would be something that these people would enjoy. She recruited me and maybe half a dozen to a dozen other people, and now it has evolved into Reno Open Studios tour. This year it's in September, I think during the second week. We open our studios on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The dates are September 9 to 11 this year.

What sort of things are you doing with them when they come to your home?

Generally, I'm painting and we discuss what I'm painting and how I'm painting. We discuss the colors I use, how I place a painting on my palette... just questions that people may have about the procedure I use.

Has this tour ever been associated with Artown?

Yes. That's the way this current group began I'd say ten years ago. It all began with Toni and the bus tours. Then it went into Artown, and now it's evolved into Reno Open Studios. It was in July as a part of Artown, but now it's separate.

So when it first started, Toni would get a busload of people and actually drive them out to different studios?

Yes. She would hire a bus.

What caused the shift from putting people on a bus and taking them to locations, to just giving them maps?

There were so many people. Instead of gathering them like at the Nevada Museum of Art, which used to be the case, people just come on their time and at their leisure in their car. Currently, I think there are forty-plus people on the list.

Do you have any sense of how many people are actually coming out to your home and visiting?

It can be steady and it can be intermittent. At another times it's steady. So it's hard to say. Last year it was pretty steady.

Has there ever been a specific piece that you're working on just for the tours, in preparation

for that, or do they see just whatever happens to be...

Just whatever I happen to be working on.

Do you know any of the other people who have been involved in the tour?

Oh, sure. I know most of them.

How have you met these different local artists that happen to be a part of the tour?

At meetings for this particular group and by going to other people's exhibits around town. Generally we sort of support each other. We're interested in what everybody else is doing, so you just naturally gravitate to what's going on.

Is there a community among artists in Reno?

Definitely. It's grown, and in that sense it's changed, but generally we all tend to support each other. We go to each other's showings and openings, just to see what other people are doing. That's always a challenge and always an inspiration too.

Are there any local artists that you particularly?

I'm particularly close to Renate Neuman. I'm close to a lot of people and I'm reluctant to name names, because I would leave somebody out.

Is there a way that you stay informed of what other people are working on or other exhibits they're doing?

I think it's by osmosis. [laughs] People tell you, you see it in the paper, or there are notices

from the university. It is sort of like osmosis. People say, "Are you going to go to go? Have you heard about this? Did you know this is happening?" I can't pinpoint a particular source.

Are the same people involved in the Portrait Society, Lattimer Art Club, and other groups for artists?

There's also the Watercolor Society. Like me, there would be people who would be members of all three. There would be people who would be members of one or two.

In terms of people that are involved in the Portrait Society, the Latimer Art Club, or the Sierra Watercolor Society, is there a range of skill and experience?

Definitely, from the very talented to the rank amateur or the very beginner.

Do you have people that you consider more of a professional artist that are part of these different groups?

No, because most of the professional artists work in drafting or in advertising. These organizations are necessarily older people because the people who work can't attend.

Have there been exhibits that have come out of the studio tours?

I think we have in the past. We have shown down at the Sierra Arts Foundation in the Riverside.

Was it enjoyable to work there with Sierra Arts and the exhibit there?

Definitely. It's in the bottom of the Riverside Hotel, and of course now that's an artists' loft. It's not a huge space, but it's adequate for a show.

I know that you've been an avid attendee of a lot of other cultural organizations in Reno. Can you tell me about visiting the Nevada Museum of Art?

When I first came to town, they were in a little house on Ralston Street. Then they were in the house on Elm Street. Prince something.... Do you know where Elm Street is? Do you know where the Reno old people's home is that overlooks the river? That's Elm Street. That fronts on Elm Street, and right next to the old people's home is this Georgian mansion. Maybe it's not Georgian. That was where it was at one time. Then where did it go? I think it went from there to where the current museum we have is. There was a smaller building there—I can't recall the name of it—that they tore down and then put up the current building. The current location is fabulous. It is absolutely astounding that we should have such a great facility in a town of this size. It's incredible. It has everything. It's a beautiful building, and very well designed for its purpose. The café there has excellent food. It is a lovely place to meet. They have a nice little auditorium where I have attended various programs. Then, of course, they have a beautiful area up on the top floor that's open for summer parties and summer weddings.

How did the previous locations compare to what the museum has now?

It was already going when I moved into town, but it was in this small home on Ralston Street. It was a private home that had been taken over and occupied by the Nevada

Museum of Art. Then the next venue was a whole lot better, but it was not designed as a museum. Then the next venue, as I recall, was a museum... perhaps it was a building not built as a museum. I don't recall that precisely. It was good enough to have Dale Chihuly showing there, though. He's the glass artist from Seattle. Then, of course, the current facility is just a marvel.

Have there been any exhibits that the museum has brought to Reno that were particularly impressive to you?

The Edgar F. and Ella C. Kleiner Collection exhibit that is currently there. This man is a former professor at the university and collected art mostly from people around here... Edgar and Ella Kleiner. It is excellent. It is art from people mostly from the area. The exhibit it takes up two of their main rooms, so it's a good size. Then there's an Audubon exhibit currently going on. I generally like to go to whatever is new. Every time they have a new show, I like to go see. I belong to a movie club, and we have lunch at the museum once a month and discuss a particular movie. When I'm there, I generally go up and see what's new.

How well is the museum supported by Reno?

It would have to have been very well supported by Reno. Otherwise, we couldn't have the lovely building that we have right now.

That's a good point. Is Reno a community that attends the museum a lot?

People in Reno definitely attend a lot of art exhibits and attend the museum. Every time I go down there, a bunch of people are roaming around. I'm quite heartened by that.

I would assume that that means it's very well supported.

In the years that you were going to the museum prior to the location that it has now would there be a lot of people there?

Yes. Generally we've had excellent people run the museum when it was smaller. I recall the Chihuly exhibit, I thought that was quite a feather in Reno's cap to have that exhibit here, and that was in the old building.

Does the museum get involved in any of these local art organizations?

No. The museum doesn't appear to think that any local art is worth looking at, I'm afraid to say. [laughs] I guess I should take that back, because they have a current exhibit of Reed Bingham's photographs of the older doctors here in town. That is supporting local people. Then they have the Museum Shop, and they carry local potters. They have local handmade items generally, including local ceramics. So in that sense, they do support local art.

What's your opinion of the local artists and the quality of the work they're producing?

Well, it goes from good to bad.

I know you attend the Nevada Opera performances. How often would you say you attend the operas?

I've been doing it for quite a while. I've attended the Reno Philharmonic and the Reno Chamber Orchestra performances also. This current opera, *Vanessa*, that they had was outstanding. It was a new production. It never had been done before. It never had been

done in the country, and I thought it was very avant-garde of Nevada Opera to bring this to Reno. I thought it could have been very well attended, but could have been better attended.

What was the quality of the production?

The quality was good. The voices were outstanding, and that's what it's all about. The sets and the costuming, I thought, were a cut above what we usually have. The voices were just excellent. It is, I think, certainly a mark in Reno's favor that we have three music organizations: the Opera, the Phil, and the Chamber. They're all very good. In fact, if you enjoy music, when Christmas comes around, the Chamber puts together small groups of three, four, five, or six people.... The productions run from December 26 to 31. I strongly recommend, if you enjoy music, you look for that at Christmastime this year.

Are there other performances that you've particularly enjoyed?

The Chamber just had a concert Sunday and it ranged from the very modern to Handel, which is about as ancient as you could get. I thought the program was outstanding. Then we have a new directress, Laura Jackson, at the Phil. She's very good.

How well attended are these different group's performances? Do people seem enthusiastic about them?

They definitely are for the Phil. The Chamber went through a rough time maybe between five and ten years ago. They have a new director, Theodore Kuchar, and he seems to be increasing the size of the audience every year. Michael Borowitz has done very well for the Opera. I think of the three, the Nevada

Opera is struggling and the other two are on pretty solid footing.

What gives you the sense that the Opera is struggling?

We used to have two solid operas a year, and now we have one. Then the other production is more like musical comedy. I don't remember when it is, exactly, but it doesn't appear to me to be a full-fledged opera. Well, the fact that the Opera is only doing one solid opera a year indicates to me that they're sort of on rocky shores. The Philharmonic has gotten better. They've increased the quality of the orchestra and the programs. I think this current one is outstanding.

Where are the venues that these different groups are performing?

The Chamber performs at the university in Nightingale Hall, and the Opera and the Phil are at the Pioneer Center.

How is Nightingale Hall as a venue?

Oh, it's excellent. The acoustics are outstanding.

Does it fill up for performances?

It seems to be growing for the Chamber, which is the group that meets there.

What is Pioneer like?

I'd say it's decent. I'd say Nightingale Hall is outstanding. The acoustics are particularly good.

Can you tell me about the cost to attend these different events?

I'd say that the Phil is reasonable and that the Chamber is cheap. I'd say that the Opera is reasonable.

Do you have a sense of who makes up the audience of these different events?

Well, mostly I go on Sunday. Older people mostly go on Sunday because it's in the afternoon and we don't have to drive at night.

The Nevada Museum of Art, the Nevada Opera, the Reno Philharmonic, the Reno Chamber Orchestra—what sort of things do they bring to Reno?

Well, they bring music that we wouldn't get to hear or attend otherwise. I think for Reno, for the size of the town, to have three such organizations is so beneficial to all of us. Culturally speaking, there are a lot of good plays in town, too, which I don't seem to find time for. I always want to go and then I just don't seem to find time to get there. I have attended Reno Little Theater, but very infrequently, unfortunately.

Do you remember their old building?

Yes. It was a brick building. It was on Sierra Street. It was rather long, as opposed to being wide. We saw *Harvey* there and I saw *Three-Penny Opera*. I remember that because I guess I must be a music aficionado.

Have you had a lifelong interest in music?

I've enjoyed music all my life. I enjoy jazz, but I don't seem to find much of that around here. It's mostly classical. I've enjoyed having the university here in town. It means a good deal as far as intellectual life is concerned.

Did any of your children attend UNR?

My first son attended UNR and graduated at the end of four years. My next three sons attended UNR and dropped out “to find themselves.” [laughs] So we decided to send the next three off to college. Ann went to Montana State at Bozeman. Paul and Keith went to the University of Colorado at Boulder. They all stayed—they did not drop out. [laughs] The other three went back to school. Their father told them that if they dropped out, that was it. They were going to be on their own. They went back to school. I have to hand it to them, they all went back to school. Dave became a college professor in chemical engineering. Neal became an orthopedic surgeon, and John is working for a convention firm here in town. They all went back and got themselves their education.

How much were you able to expose your children to cultural things?

I don’t recall what kind of cultural thing I would have exposed them to in childhood. They were permitted each to have one extracurricular activity because I couldn’t accommodate four teens’ extracurricular activities. I had seven. Mostly they played sports—baseball, football, basketball, and hockey when they were in school.

You mentioned you went on walking tours with the Historic Reno Preservation Society. Do you remember any of the walking tours?

Oh, yes, I’ve done most all of them around town. There was one in the Vassar area and there was one around California Avenue. I’m going to one that’s coming up. They’re going

to show a movie that was filmed in Reno partially down at the studio on Fourth. I’ve done all their tours that they’ve offered in various parts of town.

Was there an area or location that surprised you?

Yes, there was a motel here in town in maybe the twenties or the thirties, and it was all metal. I think it was called the Old Reno Motel. Now in subsequent years, the motel was sold individually, and there are these little individual steel houses down around Mt. Rose Street. There are two on Plumas. There about half a dozen of these little houses that people have bought and scattered around town. They’re all down in that area—the Southwest. So we did a walking tour to see all those.

So they all at one point were in one location?

Yes, they were all a motel, and then the motel dissolved some way or another, and these individual motel units were sold. They’re now these little houses. It’s cute to see what people have done with them. They all look different. You have to look twice at some of them before you can determine that that’s what they are.

We did a tour of the old houses around Elm Street over to California Avenue, and it was interesting. The people who take you on the tours and conduct them are very knowledgeable. They do a lot of research—a tremendous amount of research. It’s interesting to hear what they have to say, like the history of the particular home, or the architect who designed it, or sometimes the history of the families that lived in these particular homes.

In the time that you've been in Reno, have there been larger changes or trends that you've seen in terms of culturally what's happening?

I miss downtown. When we first came into town, there were a number of nice stores downtown that we don't have anymore. There was Gray Reed's. That was a general department store. I'm sure you've heard other people speak of Gray Reed's. There was Menard's, which was a lovely women's dress shop. Then there was Magnin's, which was also a lovely women's shop. They were all downtown, and it was nice to go downtown, do some shopping and have lunch. Now that's all gone, and we don't have anything that has really taken its place.

The change just seemed to happen over time. I don't recall whether Magnin's moved or just plain old shut down. Menard's was open for quite a while. Gray Reed's was torn down not too long after we moved here.

Where you did go to get the things that you needed after these stores closed?

Oh, dear. I think mostly Macy's.

Did you ever attend casino shows?

Oh, yes. In fact, some of the most memorable shows I've ever attended... Sarah Vaughan (who was a great jazz singer), Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, and Frank Sinatra. We saw Frank Sinatra and Dave Brubeck up at the lake at Harrah's. We saw Sarah Vaughan at Harrah's downtown. We went to see Louis Armstrong at Pappy Smith's place—Harolds Club. When Louis Armstrong opened his mouth to sing "Hello, Dolly," it was solid gold. [laughs] He had gold fillings all throughout his teeth. Later, I went to the dentist, and

he said to me, "You have to have a filling. Would you rather have a gold filling or the mercury filling?" All I could think of was Louis Armstrong and all his gold fillings. [laughs] He gave me some kind of a ceramic... well, it wasn't gold.

How has the nature of the entertainment that's available changed over the years?

I don't think we see the same quality. The music is excellent, but the entertainment... I don't think we have quality performers coming in town that we used to have, but that also may be a factor of my age. When you're younger, you're up on everything. When you get to be my age, you get pushed back and aren't current with everything.

I have to say, being my age and being aware of the casino shows that are around today, I don't think that they're any good either. [laughs]

That's reinforcement.

How do you think the cultural activities benefited Reno and the people of Reno?

Oh, I don't think there's any comparison between a university town and a town without. Certainly there are many more cultural advantages. I'm impressed by what my son, who is a professor at Michigan Technological University in the Upper Peninsula... the programs that go through there. That's a little town. Houghton has maybe 15,000 people, and Hancock has maybe 12,000 people. Yet they brought in some very interesting programs, and it's all because of the university. That's the same with us here. It's a great advantage to live in a university town.

What is it about the presence of a university that benefits the community?

I think the university itself brings in a lot of this activity to benefit their students. Also, as part of the educational milieu, it just draws like a magnet certain types of programs and individuals to come in and visit. It is very stimulating intellectually.

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Patricia Smith: I was born in Palo Alto, California, in 1942. I had a stay-at-home mom. Dad owned a painting and contracting business. He went into the service during World War II. We lived back east while he worked in the Map Service at the Pentagon, and then we moved back to Palo Alto when the war was over.

I was there until the end of my sixth grade year, when we moved to a little family dairy ranch outside of Corning, California. It had always been my dad's dream to have something like that, so we made that jump. A year and a half later, he died unexpectedly.

My mother still was a stay-at-home mother, except now she was helping to milk cows and what have you. She went back to school in Chico just for the summer and landed a job teaching third grade at Lassen View Elementary School outside of Red Bluff—between Corning and Red Bluff. She bought a little house and she taught third

grade and band, and we lived there. I spent my four high school years in Red Bluff, California, and graduated from high school there.

I have a brother. I still call him my little brother. He was born in 1950—seven years after me—and so he stayed at home quite a bit longer after I left.

I went off to Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, and I was there for two years studying basic liberal arts stuff. Initially, I had thought I'd want to major in home economics, but as I continued my education I changed my mind. For the first two years, I did a lot of basic stuff.

I transferred to Sacramento State College and got an apartment with my best friend from high school who was in Sacramento. I went to school there for one solid semester with some additional classes. I ran out of money and took a job, just a job selling insurance to California schoolteachers.

I moved to Reno first. Moved to Reno March of 1966, and I had my first child. When I became pregnant, I stopped working. That, by the way, was because my husband worked

for IBM, which stands for I've Been Moved, or at least it did back then. I had my first child—a boy—in 1967, and the second one one year eight days later. I have not birthed any babies since.

I divorced in 1977 and became the Executive Director of the Nevada Nurses Association that same year after having lobbied one session of the legislature for Common Cause. I took the job as the Executive Director for the Nurses Association in August of 1977, which turned out to be really good timing, because my marriage failed in December that year. I was executive director there for just under ten years. I also lobbied for them at the legislature, negotiated employment contracts for the school nurses at that time, and did everything else they needed.

I was no longer married, and I was on my own for four years. Ron and I married in 1981, and we combined our families—he brought two kids, three cats, and a dog to the relationship. We bought a house together where we stayed for eight years. We then moved to this house in 1989 when we got tired of all the yard work and the pool scrubbing after all the kids went to college, and have been here ever since.

After I left the Nevada Nurses Association, I worked for a company called I.C. System, which is headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota. It markets its services through associations, and they hired people who had been association execs and what have you in different parts of the country to represent them. I did that for five and a half years around fourteen Western states. After that, I decided I was really tired of travel. Besides that, Ron was having all the fun because he was with Channel 5, and I was running all over the country.

I got the job with Sierra Arts, which at the time was called Sierra Arts Foundation. They

talk about it now as Sierra Arts. That change came about when I was there, because the word “foundation” confused people because it isn't a foundation in the traditional sense. But the legal name for the organization is Sierra Arts Foundation. I went to work there in August, of 1992, and I retired July of 1999.

When you were growing up and in college, were you exposed to different cultural arts, like theater, dance, or music? Did you have an interest in that when you were younger?

Yes, and it wasn't just college. I performed in my first dance recital at age four. I danced four days a week while we were in Palo Alto, and I always loved that. It was probably something I would have pursued full-time. I reached the point where I could study under a dance teacher in San Francisco, but we moved instead.

My mother had a degree in music from the College of the Pacific. She went to school during the Depression, which is not an easy accomplishment when there's no money, and worked her way through. She got her degree in music from the College of Pacific. Especially after my dad died, it seemed to be a major priority with her. My brother and I were her whole world, and getting us raised and exposed to as much variety as she could was a real high priority for her.

Those four years that I was in high school, I did try out and get into the a cappella Choir. I didn't like the girls' glee club. I had taken a year and a half of piano lessons in Palo Alto and had decided I didn't like to sit still. I much preferred dance, but I did take piano lessons for a year and a half. So I knew a little bit about music, and so I taught myself the Bach number that was required for auditioning for the a cappella choir, and I went into that as an alto. So I did sing with the church choir and

school musical groups pretty much from that point on.

My mother would take me to Sacramento to go to Music Circus, which is theater in the round. I saw many, many musicals there. We'd go out to dinner in Redding, which was thirty miles north of Red Bluff. We would go on up to Shasta Lake and have a nice dinner and then take in some summer stock. I saw Joanne Worley perform in *Once Upon a Mattress* in a little tiny theater up there on the lake. So my mother really did go out of her way to expose me.

I remember one time they were doing a sing-along of Handel's *Messiah* at the high school auditorium. We went and sat there and struggled through the alto part together. She taught my brother to play the trumpet after I left home. The trumpet had been my dad's instrument, and so she just decided it would be fun for him. They would play duets for hours. There was a lot of that exposure going in, but probably less exposure to visual arts. There was certainly a real respect for the written word, but music was her real love. I would say music and dance are my favorite, although the best art form in the whole world is architecture, because you get to walk inside of it.

When I was at Linfield, I was in a dramatic group called the Linfield Vesper Players. There were six of us and the instructor, and we drove all over California on our Easter break and performed. We went all over the state of California, came down from Oregon. So I had done some acting. I've always been active in my church, so I've always sung in choir and in whatever kind of music opportunities were there.

The year before Ron and I were married, I started becoming involved in the Sheep Dip Show. I mostly sang, did a tiny bit of dance, and acted. When you talk to Ron, he needs to give you the background on Sheep Dip

because he's done it for forty-seven years. But I have been doing that ever since... I've been assistant director of the show four times. In fact, I've done pretty much every leadership role there except music director and producer. It's a lot of theater experience from being on stage the entire month of January every year.

I'm still singing in my church choir, and I sang in the group that was the forerunner of Bella Voce, but I dropped out. It was called the Sierra Women's Ensemble, and it was led by Dr. Michael Cleveland, who at the time was head of the Music Department at UNR. He started this women's ensemble with people from our church, but it quickly expanded with more and more difficult music, which was a challenge for me with a year and a half of piano lessons.... That became Bella Voce and now is an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit.

Was the community in Red Bluff itself supportive and receptive to that sort of thing?

Yes, they always had community concerts and we always went to all of them, and that was usually four to five performances a year. There was a good deal of support for things cultural. Of course, there wasn't a lot to choose from, so that meant that there was good support for what was there.

In fact, I went to my fiftieth high school reunion in Red Bluff this year, and they have a phenomenal new performing arts facility. Oh, my gosh, it's unbelievable. It has a professional stage, lighting, sound, and theater—incredible. So they've continued to have an interest in the arts.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first arrived here?

Well, I used to summarize it by saying that Reno was full of Ronald Reagan Republicans

and George Wallace Democrats. George Wallace was the governor of Alabama, and he was a little bit right of Ronald Reagan. What happened in the 2008 presidential election here was a complete shocker compared to how it was when I got to Reno. You could be anyplace in town in less than twenty minutes. You could practically be on the slope skiing in twenty minutes. There weren't that many stoplights. There were about 40,000 people here.

I immediately joined a church. One of the things that was really amazing was in the first ten years I was here, I became involved in a political campaign just for something to do. I had two tiny little boys. I learned that the person who was in the State Assembly...I knew nothing about the government setup here, but I learned that he had helped kill a bill that would have made the property at the end of our street into a parkland, and it made me mad. So I called, just out of the clear blue, the woman who was running for that man's seat and said, "You know, I'll help if you need me to ring doorbells." I roped a neighbor into helping, and not only did we get Mary Gojack elected, she got the parkland bill passed, she and Jean Ford together. I became really good friends with Mary, so when she decided to run for the State Senate two years later, I coordinated her campaign.

Between those two campaigns, I wrote an article that *Redbook* magazine picked up. They were running a contest for which they wanted manuscripts about what it felt like to be a woman. Well, I'd just come off of this phenomenal campaign. That was the year that Nixon got in. Nixon won by a landslide. At any rate, we were in a district that was 63 percent Republican, the incumbent was a Republican, and we got her in. We were allowed to observe at the polls as the voting machines came down, and it looked like she

was winning by maybe two votes a precinct, practically nothing. We had campaigned at every door, and under every rock. We had been every place and it paid off. It paid off. We got her in.

I got an opportunity to write an article, and it wasn't as if I had been writing for publication, or had taken journalism in school. It was nothing like that. The article was in the October 1972 issue of *Redbook* magazine. They got something like four thousand manuscripts. They published a dozen of them, and mine was one.

I wrote about how I became involved in Mary Gojack's campaign, what it had meant to me, and what I was thinking when I did that as a mother of two little kids just staying at home. The question was, "How does it feel to be a woman?" This was unusual, because I started lobbying when I was hired by Common Cause for the 1977 session. The article came out in 1972. So there was a five-year period after we got Mary into the Senate before I began working for the Nevada Nurses Association.

Common Cause didn't ever pay lobbyists then, but they wanted to get—if you're ready for this—the Equal Rights Amendment through. I said, "Those Ronald Reagan Republicans and George Wallace Democrats are not going to vote for women to have equal status with men in this state. But are there any other bills you'd like passed? I suppose I could give it a try, but I've never done this before." I'm telling you though, I became good. [laughs]

I had five bills, and I got all of them through except for the Equal Rights Amendment. I had the bill for open meetings, which I didn't admit to for many years because they screwed it up in the Conference Committee at the end. Anybody who broke the open meeting law had to forfeit their elected office, and it was the only state in the country that had that.

They fixed that real fast in the next session. It was like a crap shoot when they had the Conference Committee. Media were all there, because open meetings are really important to journalists and campaign reform and lobbyists. It was all elementary work, but I got every one of them passed. Then I was hired by the Nevada Nurses Association right after that session.

The fact that you were working on Mary Gojack's campaign is incredible. Had you really been interested in politics prior to that?

No. What made me think of Mary was she was an active supporter of the Nevada Opera, and Ted Puffer was its artistic director back then. Well, she actually even took me to a silent auction, and these are two of the pictures that I bought [indicating pictures in her home]. I bought a dozen of Robert Capel's numbered charcoals. When I started lobbying, the full set of twelve was in the Assembly lounge in the Legislative Building. I've got these two and I've got two more up stairs, and the others are unframed. I got the whole set for six bucks, because nobody else bid on it at the silent auction.

Anyway, she was a big supporter of opera. I've sung in the opera chorus once for *Aida*. Boy, I'll never do that again. That was hard. It was in Italian and I don't speak Italian, so it was tough. It was really hard. That was considerably later because it was after Ron and I were married, and we both sang in it together.

Our church choir director at the time was Jon Fey, who's an up-and-coming opera star. He's been all over, and has a wonderful tenor voice. He's up at Tahoe now, I believe, when he isn't running around being an opera star.

I'm trying to think what else was going back then. I think the Philharmonic at that

point.... I can tell you about all of these—for the Opera, Phil, and Nevada Festival Ballet, there's an artistic person or somebody who has this vision. There is a creative artistic-type person has this vision, and that person could be a Maggie Banks, who had the vision for Ballet, or it could be a Ted Puffer for Opera, or Ron Daniels for Philharmonic. Then, at some point there's a change.

The same thing happened with Reno Chamber Orchestra. At some point, that person who was the glue that held everything together leaves, and then the organization is challenged with how they're going to keep going. The Nevada Festival of Ballet didn't make it. They went under after I left [Sierra Arts], so I'm not too sure what happened. I don't know what the AVA Ballet Theater is, but maybe they're connected somehow.

As I understand it, they are the resident for ballet company at Pioneer, and I spoke to someone who said they're the most similar thing in Reno to Nevada Festival Ballet.

One of the really wonderful things about Nevada Festival Ballet, and this is even compared to Las Vegas, is they did all of their dances to a live orchestra. All over the country you will find canned music. You'll find recorded music. Ballet is probably one of the most expensive performing arts to put on, particularly if you do it really well with the Philharmonic behind you. Now you're paying all the musicians (and you're paying at least union scale), and you're paying all the ballerinas.

Nevada Festival Ballet was really a poor struggling little organization. I actually provided \$100-a-month office space for them in the Sierra Arts Center, when I worked there, just so they had a place to land. They left us while I was there. They moved. They

had a place out on West Fourth Street, which was west of Keystone a bit on the south side of the street. They had a ballet school, and that's where they relocated to.

Another organization I had in my building was the Reno Chamber Orchestra. It went through a similar situation. I really thought they'd bit the dust. They were so busy with infighting between the musicians and the people on the board, that it was as their music director was getting toward the end... They just worshipped him. There was a big blowup between the board and the musicians, and it was just hideous. It was toward the end of my seven years at Sierra Arts, and I thought for sure they would go under. They would get one executive director—I use the word loosely—after another, who didn't really have those skills....

Something turned around for them, and they are really good... Reno's little orchestra or smallest little orchestra. They have excellent musicians. Many of them double in the Philharmonic. I believe, although I don't know from firsthand experience, that they seem to be well managed. It appears that they promote their stuff, and that they bring in guest artists. It just looks like they managed to land on their feet, and I'm pleased about that.

Another one that went through a difficult time was the Nevada Opera. Ted Puffer moved to New York.... He was the brain child of the Nevada Opera. He was the artistic director. They were mounting at least three performances a year, I think. That's another toughie—lots of costumes. You rent the costumes and you bring in the sets, the music, and the guest artists. They've had some real struggles, but they're still up and running. They'll just do a thing or two each year, and so they may well grow to be something bigger again.

The Philharmonic is the real success story. When Ron Daniels left, they showed them all the right way to do it. When Barry left, they got the current gal, Laura Jackson. They were so classy in how they did that—an entire season with a guest conductor for every performance. The whole community was involved in decision-making. They're a wonderful example for other groups to follow how to do it. It's an ongoing struggle in every community there is though, because it's this one person who had the vision, and that's the artist.

I don't know if they call themselves the Sierra Nevada Master Chorale anymore, but the Master Chorale has been around for quite a while, and I think the director is Richard Lee. They're still at the point where everything is his, and his wife does solo work for them. They're still at the point where their board.... I met with them when I was the exec at Sierra Arts. They wanted to pick my brain. There were about four or five of them—Richard and some of their key officers. They were wanting to know how to get more respect and get bigger and better. I tried to tactfully explain to them that there was nobody on their board except people who sang in that group, and you need an independent community-driven board. They still have a ways to go, and at some point he's going to leave that job and then we'll see what happens.

The visual arts have just exploded. The museum... it was the old museum, with the E.L. Cord School Museum School. Steven High came in as Executive Director of the Nevada Museum of Art, and he came in with a real vision. The next thing that happened was everybody got behind him. They got this phenomenal architect and they have built this amazing building. He left after I retired to go back to Virginia and run not one but two museums. I am sure he's doing very well

because Steven was just a phenomenal, and wonderful manager, and decent man, with great vision. He was able to work with people and was generating a lot of support. So the Nevada Museum of Art has had a wonderful transition.

The university has always been a major player in all these things. The weakest discipline when I was there was theater. There have been little theater companies [in Reno]. The one that's been around the longest, Reno Little Theater, is a true community theater, which is great fun. I perform right now in Ageless Repertory Theatre, and it is great fun, but in all fairness it's more amateur. As far as really good top-quality theater, the university used to produce some really good stuff. There have been all kinds of theater groups [in Reno]. Gothic North was one, and Nevada Shakespeare.

Reno Little Theater still exists, but Circus Circus expanded, and there went their beautiful little brick building. Down it went, and Reno Little Theater has been running around town ever since trying to find a home. They've been at Hug High School for a while, I noticed.

Bruka started in my building. They were a children's theater, and they sold tickets. I let them set up a card table in my gallery, which was the first thing you walked into in the Center. They performed their little plays for children in our lower level, and they were wonderful. Obviously, Scott Beers was the key to Bruka at its beginning. I don't think he's there any longer. I believe Mary Bennett is at Bruka right now.

They're people who've been around in the arts community when I was really, really involved. When you're with a local or regional arts agency, which is really what Sierra Arts is, you're exposed to all the disciplines. There were certain roles that we played that no one

else did. We published *Encore*, which was the arts publication. Nobody else did that. We kept an artist's registry. The Nevada Arts Council might also have parallel information. Our artist's registry was every discipline and every artist. When people were looking for somebody to play the guitar at their wedding reception, we could go through our file and see where they were registered with us and refer them on.

The external exhibition program started when I was there, by my program director. That [program] was starting to manage visual arts in libraries and at City Hall. I don't know if McKinley Arts and Culture Center (the city-owned building on Riverside Drive that was a deserted old school when I was there) manages their rotating exhibits or if Sierra Arts does. Sierra Arts is still doing the City Hall exhibit, even when City Hall moved. They just moved the gallery. The program has expanded a lot, so that they put paintings of people's work in coffeehouses and other places, which is wonderful for the artists.

There was a huge explosion of services during my seven years at Sierra Arts. There was everything from folklife festivals in Wingfield Park to Artown, which started at the same time. In fact, I think we did our folklife festival during Artown once it started, but it was a multicultural folklife festival, so we had everything from Tongan choirs to Scottish bagpipe players to Irish cloggers and everything in between. We had their food as well.

Can you describe where the Sierra Arts Building was and what the facility was like?

That building was built approximately twenty years before Sierra Arts got it, by the Boy Scouts of America. It was on the corner of Court and Flint Streets. [The building is still

there, just vacant.] It's the one right behind the Lake Mansion, which is occupied by the Very Special Arts (which I housed in my building also). Very Special Arts moved to the Lake Mansion when it was out by the Convention Center and stayed with the Lake Mansion when it relocated on what was a city parking lot, where it is now. The building right behind it, painted gold and trimmed in purple, yellow, red, and teal—you can only do that in an Arts Center—is [where Sierra Arts was].

When I got there, Sierra Arts had had a rough time. They had done some really neat things in their early years, but when I got there, they had had an executive director that had not been good for them. For many years, they had people...Carol Mosel [phonetic] was a doctor's wife and was exec for practically nothing. Things have evolved now to where they have a full staff that is paid. When I came along there was a program director there who was the only person keeping the doors open. Everyone else had left. There had been no requests made of members to renew their membership for eighteen months, the excuse being the computer didn't work. There was just an immense amount of stuff to attend to.

My first year was just an incredible whirl, because, really, very little was working when I got there. I got really good at begging for money and begging for computers, I even got a parking lot resurfaced, and got the carpet laid for free. The John Ben Snow Trust... Roland Melton got me a little grant so I could go out and get some carpet, and then I used the people in the carpet-laying apprentice program at TMCC to lay it. We did a new vinyl floor in the little kitchen downstairs, and they did that too, and tile when you come right in the doors. All of that was stuff that I just begged for. The paint job was begged. I got a great deal on the paint, but had to buy it. Then the apprentice program came in under the

direction of a topnotch painting contractor here in town and painted the whole building. It was quite a sight.

I felt sorry for the beige lawyers next door. Their whole building was beige, and our building was gold and the metal around the windows was red. So, it stood out. We had railings that were all teal across the front, and then in the front breezeway where it went across the full width of the front of the building we had the brightest purple wall you've ever seen. The ceiling of the breezeway was yellow. Oh, yeah, it was hot. [laughter] It was great.

I must have gotten a grant. I got a lot of grants while I was there. At any rate, we had three flagpoles because it had been the Boy Scouts' building. I had architects and people by then that would donate design, so we made three signs. There are three signs up there right now— they're not ours, but they are copies of what I got. Ours said "Sierra Arts", and there was a purple one, and a red one. They were tall and narrow, and they were on the three flagpoles. I even got Moana Nursery to give me a bunch of plants and went out there and planted the gardens.

It was really a nice building. We had a very competitive exhibition program, which Sierra Arts continues to this day in their gallery in the Riverside. We had managed to basically get the money in place for the Riverside while I was still there, which was a huge job. Once that was in place I was ready to retire. I knew, because I had all that lobbying experience, that the odds were not really good that they were going to pull it off if I left the year before. So I gave them a one-year notice so they could prepare, and then went to bat with the city of Reno people assigned to get money. We got a lot of money all in 1999 and brought in Artspace from Minneapolis-St. Paul to do the conversion of the old Riverside Hotel.

How did the Artists Lofts start?

I can remember one day in particular, I had just learned what live/workspace was. It's what it's called technically—a live/workspace. You have your living space and your workspace together in the same unit. I had just caught up with the lingo, but my program director, who had been there longer than I had, helped me through a lot of that. We were walking down the Riverwalk, which I think was the same length that it is now, so this was more toward the end of my seven years there. We were putting on the Artists on the Streets event, so we rented tents from Camelot and put them out in front of the El Dorado and another one in front of the old Pioneer. We were looking at the old Riverside hotel, and I said to Stephanie, the program director jokingly, "Well, I think that's where we ought to have live/workspace." She joked, "Gee, that'd be really neat."

We went ahead and planned our Artists on the Streets and I didn't think anything more about it. I then went to a convention of Americans for the Arts, which is the national organization. They had the convention in Minneapolis. I took Jill Berryman, who was my program director, with me, and Rick Woods. Rick was the editor of the *Encore*, and he did all of the brochures and announcements of gallery openings and festivals. He did all of that stuff. So the three of us went, and we had to say ahead of time if we wanted to go on this one extra thing you could do while you were at convention. They just needed a headcount, but you were going to go tour some artists' live/workspace done by a local company there in the Twin Cities.

I had signed up the three of us. Well, when we got back to convention we'd been up early, gone to bed late, and we were exhausted. We started saying, "Oh, gee, I wish we didn't have

to go to this tour of the live/workspace. It would be just great to just lie by the pool. But, no, we've got to go because I said we would."

So we did. We went to see two places that were almost side by side in St. Paul that were some of the first buildings done by Artspace. Artspace is a 501(c)3 that started in the Minneapolis area and had recently opened a new live-work unit up around Duluth and was starting to put their feelers out. It was really kind of funny, because it was like everyone on this little fieldtrip was shoving their business cards at Kelly Lindquist, who is the president, of Artspace.

This poor guy, he's got all of these cards, but we're saying, "You've got to talk to us. We're the ones."

Apparently, unbeknownst to us, he went back to his office and he said, "You wouldn't believe it. There are people all over the country wanting us to talk to them, but there are these two blondes from Reno.... [laughter]"

He came to our hotel and we sat in the little lounge for about an hour, and we talked about the Mapes. That was the hotel that was there, and we're saying, "We don't suppose you'd be interested. Would you like to look at the Mapes? Would that be something?" We're just thinking, "This is ridiculous. We cannot believe this guy is even talking to us."

I think it was just a meant-to-be thing. Their board had just gotten to the point where they said, "[We're looking for] the right kind of a deal and we would be interested in expanding outside." They were looking at some place in Seattle, where there was a little space. To get Artspace to come to your community though is no easy feat at all.

We said, "Well, we'll talk around." Fortunately, I had been a lobbyist and I knew a lot of people. I started talking to various City Council people about Artspace. I was talking to city staff, but not Charles McNeeley

[phonetic], who was the city manager at the time. So I needed somehow to get beyond staff without being impolite about that.

Fortunately, Katie Simon [phonetic], the county manager, was on my board. Katie said, "It is appropriate for me. I'm on the same level with Charles, so I will take you and we will go have a meeting with Charles." We did, and Charles liked it a lot.

Artspace had given me this wonderful book with all these pictures. You flip the pages and there are pictures of these wonderful units in Duluth. I think Charles said something like, "I don't suppose they'd let city managers who play the guitar live here. This is really cool." [laughter]

I took my little horse and pony show on the road. I saw various members of the City Council. I think Sandy Pierce [phonetic] is the only one I didn't meet with personally, and I talked with her on the phone. Every one of them thought, "Gee, this is really cool. This would be a neat thing to do."

At this point, we were talking about the Riverside and the Mapes, and I'd had them look at the McKinley property also on Riverside Drive. They'd indicated the Mapes was not conducive to good reuse. Its layout was not conducive to making it through an earthquake. It would have been a real expensive retrofit, which they had to do to the Riverside anyway, but it was easier [at the Riverside].

So, they actually came out and made a decision. We're saying, "We're trying to save the day here, right? Okay. Well, Mapes isn't going to work, huh? Well, would you mind looking through the Riverside?" It was a mess. I mean, it had been flooded in there, so it was a real mess.

You can still get historic tax credit money, so they took it back to the rock brickwork around the outside and totally redid the

inside, which is how we got lofts. It was a residential hotel, though, for divorcees. They threw their diamonds in the river, and then they went and lived there for six weeks.

We lucked out. When the Artspace people came to town, we had to get the city to pay for that, because Sierra Arts didn't have any money. By then, by meeting with each one separately, I asked, "What would it cost to get some people out here? Because they're a nonprofit just like Sierra Arts. They do not have the money." It was six-grand. In the city's world it was nothing, but you just had to get them to agree to do it, and they did.

So we had the Artspace people out here, and we took full advantage of their being here. We knew at the end of that first site visit that we were going to shoot for the Riverside because the Mapes was not going to convert, at least not according to the Artspace people. It would be really jim-dandy if at some point they'd make that school on Riverside Drive into an art center of some sort, because it was just a natural beautiful setting.

When I left in '99, we'd gotten the money together. It would have been in '96 or '97 that Artspace came out. It felt like it took longer to get it together, but I could be wrong. When you're lobbying and the pieces are starting to fall into place, it can happen pretty fast. Of course, I couldn't lobby because I was the exec of a nonprofit, so I was advocating. I was the advocate.

That's how it started. I had in the back of my mind—and I've always done this—that I'm going to keep plowing ahead like it's going to happen, and if something happens to stop me, I'll know I gave it my best. I won't ever say, "Oh, jeez, this couldn't happen, so I'm not going to try." I just went ahead assuming we were going to have Artists Lofts in the Riverside Hotel. I can do this. You know?

It did take the whole year, because they have regulations at the Nevada state level.... Each county actually has regulations for low-income housing tax-credit dollars. The historic tax-credit dollars, I think, were federal. We also got some HUD money. There were all these different sources of money. The toughie and the biggie.... Probably about a million dollars of the money, or at least \$800,000 of it, would have come from low-income tax-credit dollars that were (I didn't realize going into it), highly competitive.

I've been known to go up against other people when I was lobbying and have to just outsmart them and get what I wanted. I had never gone up against these people, though. They were real estate developers, and they had long since discovered that there was this money available if they built low income housing. They could belly-up to the public trough and get this money. They could apply every year, and they'd get some of it. Well, I needed 100 percent of it. [laughter] I didn't need to share.

They were not pleased with me at all. The people from Artspace, would come out. They were committed, and their board was behind them 100 percent. The neat thing about Artspace was their B team was as good as their A team. It didn't matter who they sent. They were really impressive people—the building people, the designer, the woman who came out who said, “We don't want the Mapes, but the Riverside might work,” Deidre has left Artspace now, but she was just dynamite.

I didn't write these grants. Artspace people wrote grants. I'm running around the state because the low-income tax credits came through a process that each county developed. The state, developed the regulations, but you had hearings in all the counties. There were some major changes we had to have in the regulations in order for a Minnesota company to come in.

There was a hearing up here, and I can remember this because my poor president was Brad Van Wort [phonetic], who's an architect and a neat man. We're sitting there in this crowd, and these developers, of course, are frothing at the mouth because they want this money. Here are these privileged artists getting all this money from the poor people. I can remember when they explained, “You're from Minnesota and you can't do that without a local.”

I said, “Yoo-hoo. Sierra Arts will do it.”

Afterwards, poor Brad says, “Did you just get us in the real estate business?” [laughs]

“I'm sorry. And yes. That's what happened.”

It's been a wonderful partnership, although I've not kept in touch. When I left in '99, I never looked back. I would say, from my observations, that they've worked really well together. I think for Sierra Arts ultimately, after I left, things were looking really, really shaky. The city got rid of Oliver McMillan, who was the developer who built the movie theater downtown, and that opened the possibility of the city working directly with Artspace.

I'm not too sure what happened, but the way I understand it is, Sierra Arts bought that hotel for \$300,000. Artspace's relationship to the project would have lasted, I believe, ten years and they could stay on or not. Who knows what may have changed since I left. The actual property management was farmed out to someone here in town who is in the business of renting units. I was certainly keeping a very long list of people who wanted in there if that project flew.

By the time I was in my last year, I wasn't willing now to say, “Well, if something comes up, I'll just walk away.” I wanted that really bad. [laughter] I really wanted that badly. So that was the last thing I did before I left, and I walked out of there exhausted. I said to

Ron, "I'm not even going to slow down." He did the same thing when he left Channel 5. It's like you're running fifty million miles an hour, and you go right off the edge of a cliff. It's your last day, you leave, and it's over, but you never slow. You just keep going.

Jill, who had been with me in Minnesota, was shoving her business card at Kelly at the same time I was shoving mine. In fact, I think she thought of it as doable before even I did. She just thought, "Why not?"

I'm saying, "I don't know about this." She felt positive about the possibility of the project the whole time she was my program director.

One time we were at another Americans for the Arts convention, and they had this great Irish band. They always had wonderful performances and dance, and everything they did when we came to town, no matter where our convention was, was heaven. You would come out of the hotels and there would be performance art in the park across the street or dancers. It was just a wonderful immersion in being taken care of by arts.

They brought in this Irish band, and as a lead (though he doesn't play with them all the time), they brought in Tommy Sands. Well, Tommy Sands in Ireland was a million-record seller and had many popular albums. He lives outside of Belfast. So Jill struck up a friendship with Tommy, and by the end of the convention, she's wanting to bring him to Reno. I said "Okay, now, I'm having trouble finding the money to bring this artist in from Winnemucca, and you want me to get Tommy Sands?"

Well, what happened was I did get Tommy Sands, and there were people all over it. The minute he performed one show, Moya Lear immediately paid his airplane ticket for the next year. Oh, they loved him. He would have dinner at different people's houses. He sat at this table and he played his first million-seller

song for us on his guitar when he came here for dinner one night.

He's still coming to Reno. He was here this last year. I noticed he was sponsored by the Humanities Committee, Sierra Arts, Channel 5, and god knows who else. He came every year. He had never done this kind of work before, but Jill envisioned him working with at-risk kids. In Ireland you get your brains blown out because you're of the wrong religion. Here it's because you're in the wrong gang, but dead is dead.

There was something magical. He's like a little leprechaun, this precious little guy, and the kids loved him. The real magic, that we did not expect, was I then could go for grant money that was social-program-type grant money. We were going into Wittenberg Hall and Washoe High School with Tommy and others. We had artists in there that taught kids how to make their own cameras, how to take pictures with them, and how to do their own black rooms. We had all kinds of great programs going in Wittenberg. It's called Arts Alternatives, and I believe it's still going.

That's just another thing we did, and Tommy just had a way with those kids. Kids who hadn't spoken to anybody were giving him hugs. I watched one two-hour session with Washoe High kids, and the biggest miracle was seeing the teachers come alive again. You could tell they were downtrodden and just beat, and by the end, they saw their kids starting to relate. Amazing. They were writing their own songs by the end of the session. Tommy was wonderful.

For the Artists Lofts, can you explain where the low-income tax money came from?

The way it works is—and I know this because Ron and I have been on the other end of the deal—people can invest, according to a

law passed by Congress, in a project that is at least a certain percentage for low income. This is defined annually by the feds as a certain income, or one half of a certain income, and it varies every year depending upon what the incomes were in your community. People can actually invest their money, and we did this, into what was like a mutual fund of low income tax properties. They have to approve you as an investor...you have to have enough money, because your investment will be tied up for fifteen years, and you cannot get at it. It is the most illiquid place you could put your money. We invested \$10,000 or \$12,000—not a whole big chunk.

What happens to the person who invests the money is, because you're willing to let your money to be used to make housing for people who can't afford to pay the going rate, you are permitted to subtract a dollar amount from your bill on April 15th every year based upon what you invested. They send you the paperwork, and it says this is the amount of the tax credit you get. Now, it's not a tax deduction; it's a credit. If you owe \$10,000 and your credit is for \$3,000, you only owe \$7,000. You get a credit for ten years. They'll send you the papers each year, and it'll vary. We got really great credits for about seven years, then it started petering off. At ten years you don't get any tax credits anymore, but you don't get your money back for five more years.

I think we invested \$12,000 and our tax credits had been over \$17,000 during the course of that time, so we made \$5,000 on our \$12,000, which is pretty good.

What happened for the Artists Loft, is a syndicate, in Washington, D.C., I believe, had the low-income money that they would tie up for fifteen years, and take the credits for ten, according to the law that Congress passed. That money was available through each state, which set up the regulations about how that money would be distributed. That's why it

was so difficult for me to get all of it (I needed all of it), because it was pretty competitive. These other developers wanted to get this free money that they would then be able to use to build low-income housing.

It doesn't mean what they build is bad; it just means I needed all the money. There were things going up all over town, and I'm sure many of the same developers are still doing it. It's worthwhile to have low-income housing around.

The comparison to that would be historic tax-credit money. I know less about how it works, except that it's not competitive, so it doesn't matter how many other properties want to have that money. If you qualify, one of the requirements is you don't knock down the outside of the building. You get a certain amount of money, but it is nothing like the huge amount you get out of low-income tax credits.

There were cultural grants available, and there was a grant written.... I went to the hearing in Carson City. I think maybe it was the Humanities Committee that wrote it. Anyway, there was just little trickles of money here and there.

Did you get any money from the city?

They certainly were invested in the project there, and I'm thinking the answer to that question is yes, but I must say I can't recall the specifics. The City 2000 Arts Commission had been formed while I was at Sierra Arts. That came about early on while I was at Sierra Arts. They gave little grants to artists and arts organizations. There must have been city money involved with Oliver McMillan, because they had first grabs on the Riverside and that vacant lot that's still empty that's on Sierra right behind the hotel. Oliver McMillan had both of those.

So Oliver McMillan owned the Riverside prior to Sierra Arts getting it?

They were the developer of choice that the city contracted with to develop the river district, and they never got past, basically.... They did the theater, and they may have demolished the... can't remember what the name of those theaters, but Granada, I think was one of the theaters. There were theaters right across the street where the Palladio is now. There was a theater on that corner, and then a store, and then another theater. I think some of that got taken down while Oliver McMillan was there.

I can't remember if the city took hold of the Riverside. Sierra Arts did not own it, and at one point Artspace and Sierra Arts were going to have to be dealing with Oliver McMillan. I remember at one point thinking Oliver McMillan's not hanging around there—it's not going to work. So I said, "Well, what happens if Oliver McMillan pulls out of this deal?" I was worried that that would be really hard for Artspace.

I can remember Will, from Artspace saying, "Oh, well, we'd be fine with that."

I thought, "Okay, then that works for me too."

I don't know how it was that Sierra Arts had to pay what I believe was \$300,000 or thereabouts for that building. So it must have been under ownership of the city. It had been Pick Hobson's Riverside, and had gone through different owners. Each time they had to come up to code, which is one of the reasons it was better to convert.

It might have been a condemned building that the city owned or that they had taken possession of as part of redevelopment. The more I think of it, the more I think that makes sense. It is eminent domain and you just help yourself to the property. That would have been

an easy one to help themselves to because it was empty and basically they thought would have been....In fact, the wrecking ball was so close to when we got this—like within a week or two—that the Riverside would have been demolished and it would never have happened. We were that tight on our timing on this thing.

By meeting with each member of the City Council and getting the city to agree that it was worth a try, they held off wrecking the building. It was a mess. It had been flooded, and it was a real mess in there. The city held off just on the outside chance that maybe these crazy people from Sierra Arts had something that could really work. So it did. It worked.

How do you think downtown benefited from this project working out?

There were a number of key things that happened, and I said all along....I can remember a City Council meeting I attended when I had come back from Carmel, California, and I had said to them, "You know, people say, 'Oh, Carmel's neat, but Reno will never be like Carmel.' I'm standing here to tell you it can be."

The impact [of developing the Riverside] was far beyond the building. We enabled thirty-five cottage businesses to start kicking out their products from the thirty-five loft units— some were dancers, some were writers, some were sculptors. All different kinds of people were in there. This is what I tried to tell the city before they approved it. When you've got thirty-five businesses operating out of there.... I had seen the ones in St. Paul that day at that convention, and the old warehouse neighborhood where they put those two in buildings, had a population of something like fifty or a hundred people. Most

of them were bums lying on the sidewalk. At their next census, they were up 5,000 people and there were high mucky-muck condominium projects all around where there had been decay before.

What I had said to the City Council was, "If we can use that as a rule of thumb, this is the beginning. The other things will come as a result."

They were already interested in redeveloping the river corridor, because they had lined up Oliver McMillan and had fought a bloody battle trying to get a theater there that nobody wanted. The theater had moved ahead, and I'm fairly sure the demolition right across the street at Sierra and First on the southeast corner was part of that.

They already had a vision starting, and it was at the genesis of the powers that be recognizing what the arts could do for them. There were towns around the country where the city councils and the mayors were starting to discover what the arts could do for them. Jeff Griffin (who happened to live in that house right there—we were neighbors), was mayor at the time, and basically he became so hated over the theater project, he didn't run for reelection. He did what he thought was right in pushing for what he pushed through.

He said that at the National Conference of Mayors—they have various standing committees—the Art Committee had gone bonkers. It was huge. All the mayors wanted to be on that committee. They all wanted to see what the other people were doing in their communities, because they knew that the arts could save their downtowns.

All of that was starting to come about as I'm saying, "We can be like Carmel in many ways. We can." It's true that when those units started being occupied, that was a major turning point, as was the theater, and the

Whitewater Park. When you start, you need that critical mass. When you start getting enough key pins in place, it just turns over.

Another piece was Artown. I think Artown played a role as well—just the proximity to the performing arts place across the street. When I left, the last thing I was babbling on about was getting the old Post Office, because I saw a Ghirardelli Square kind of thing. There's an atrium in the middle of that building that nobody knows about, so I visualized glass elevators going up and down, plants, and performance art going on while you are also going into the brew pub or checking out the boutique.

I think there is a move now on the city's part to do that with the old Post Office. It did not happen in my time, because, believe you me, getting post offices is not an easy thing to do. The feds move very slowly and they don't need help. They just need a few P.O. boxes.

So I would say the Artists Lofts had a major impact, but in all fairness so did the theater. Standing alone, that theater could have been a problem. If the city didn't have a parking garage right across the street that they were going to let people park in for free if they go to the theater....All of that was very important.

When Artown came in the first year, I was part of that committee. We would get together and meet about how Artown would come about. In the meantime, Sierra Arts is busy providing programs and services. We were up and running. We were one block off of Wingfield Park. We were just one block up from Arlington. We were screaming. We had galleries and festivals. We had stuff going on around the community, and we had artists in the schools. We were hopping.

So to get these other pieces... To get Artown, where a month is amazing... It was called, for your record, Uptown Downtown Artown. It

was not called Artown alone. It was Uptown Downtown Artown, which was a brainchild of the P.R. man Mark Curtis, Jr. (his dad had his own ad agency). Coming in to play a pivotal role as well at that time was Karen Craig. Karen Craig, who was a mom of small children—had worked part-time for Nevada Festival Ballet and had started getting them grants. She was a grant writer, and she was fantastic.

I can remember one meeting when we were all talking about this idea for having a festival because the community just didn't know what we had here. We weren't suggesting that we were going to create a new festival. We were going to take everything that exists and we were going to take the P.R. guy who was going to give it an umbrella, and it was going to become a festival of events. Karen said, "You know, I've done this kind of thing before, and things evolved." She then became the real leader, like an executive director. She stayed there for quite a few years before Beth McMillan (the one with the wonderful British or Australian accent) came in. You cannot say enough about the role that Artown played.

Christine Fey was working for the city of Reno and was staffing their brand-new City 2000 Arts Commission, which was all about what the city was going to look like arts and culture-wise by the year 2000. When 2000 rolled around they had to get rid of that name, so now they just call it the city's Arts Commission. By then though the city had fallen in love with the arts. They had artists living and working in the hotel, they had all these wonderful events going on down at the river, and now they had all these artists on the streets. It was just a love fest. It was not like that when I started work at Sierra Arts. That falling in love happened while I was at Sierra Arts, and it just got stronger after I left.

Can you tell me how you found out about the job at Sierra Arts?

They had an ad in the local paper, and it was the first I had heard of them. They were looking for an executive director in very small print. I thought, "Oh, these people don't have any money." [laughs] They didn't. They were a mess when I got there.

They had a hardworking board though. There is a certain amount of prestige in being on that board, so it was a huge board which could be unworkable. It had something like forty-two people on it. I found that down through the years that you could get people on that board that maybe couldn't show up to meetings, but that were real handy otherwise. For Example, Katie Simon got me in to see Charles McNeeley about the Artists Lofts. Michonne Ascuaga not only was able to help us get the Brewhaha started, but at one time I wanted to do a Christmas event in our new gallery with our new carpet and paint in this nice setting. Son of a gun if a Nugget truck didn't pull up in front with tray upon tray upon tray of the most wonderful hors d'oeuvres. Michonne never made one board meeting, though.

We had people who were somewhat deadweight. We tried to move some of them out, but it was always a really big board. I would get maybe twenty-five at a board meeting, and I was glad to have them.

I can tell you that Sierra Arts has always been the creator and publisher of what is now called the *Sierra Arts* magazine. When I inherited it, it was *Encore*. I don't recall if it was *Encore* before, but there was a woman by the name of Fran Harvey who was the editor of that *Encore* magazine for many years before I got there. I went ahead and started doing it when I was there. It served its function in those years. It was nothing like what we

ultimately had and nothing like what they have now, either.

The big challenge was distribution. I tried to work a deal with *Reno News & Review*, and I think possibly they've actually worked a deal with them more recently. They've got wonderful distribution. I tried and tried and tried. We were trying to work out all kinds of things. A part of the problem was we were keeping a higher standard on paper quality. We wanted the page edges cut. It was an arts piece. Now it's a rag, just like the *News & Review*—so it's jagged around the edges. When I did it, it was a much heavier paper, it was cut slick, and it was very carefully designed. It was very artistic. Now it's a different look and it's equally good. It's different. It opens up the opportunity to work in concert with the *Reno News & Review* though, which has always been very good to work with. John Murphy is great. He is one of our Sheep Dippers. He is so great with Sheep Dip. They're just good to work with, so I'm not surprised that they have found a way to work with the Sierra Arts publication.

At one point we were even talking about making it the art district publication but don't try to be anything bigger than that. As the art district swells that might be a good fit. The museum got its new building and it's a block over. The Lear Theater needs to get their building finished, but I don't know how they're going to do it. That's the piece that's missing right now, the Lear Theater. I can tell you, being a member of a theater company, that we really need performance space big time.

Do you remember the hiring process at Sierra Arts?

Yes, the board hired me. There were, I think, three of us who interviewed that they

had narrowed it down to. David Line was the president. Joan Dyer was on the board, as well as Bob Gorrell from the university. It was a good-sized board, probably about twenty-two to twenty-five people that were there. Twenty people were there when I interviewed with the whole board, not just a committee. The whole board had to interview me.

They were shell-shocked. They had brought this woman in from Florida and had paid her more money than they'd ever paid anybody. All these doctors' wives had done it for next to nothing. She was the product of the government, and she didn't get it. I don't know why I did. I can tell you that there was no educational path to organizational management back then. Now you can get a degree in association management, but back when I was in it you couldn't. I think there was one place maybe in Tennessee where you could get a degree, but it was just a new area.

What happens is you would get people taking the job of executive director, whether it was for the Tire Dealers Association, the Medical Association, the firefighters, or whomever. They were either firefighters or tire dealers, or they could be people with a journalism background. They could be people politically...in my case, the nurses needed somebody to lobby. They were looking for somebody in the political arena, and I had been down there, and that's why they came after me. They didn't know if I had any idea how to run an organization. I didn't know if I had any idea. I talked as sharp as I could, and it turned out that I was, but it was on-the-job training.

In both organizations that I ran, there was a person—with the Nurses, it was a woman by the name of Jan Zintec—who had been holding down the fort until I could get there. Jan was a nurse, and took me under her wing. That's how I learned what I needed to know.

Some of it was just gut instinct. I guess I'm just a natural at running things. I ran a Cub Scout pack when my kids were little. I just seem to be a natural at that.

So when I got to Sierra Arts, it was Stephanie. She was a wonderful program director. She was a perfectionist, and she was doing the *Encore*, which is why it was so perfect. She was doing all the programs, really. I just took advantage of talking with her.

In fact, until she left I was still picking her brain. She went to law school and she is now a lawyer. I was never too proud as her boss to say, "Help me. Help me with this. I don't get this."

So when I didn't know what live/workspace was because I didn't travel in those circles, Stephanie could say, "Well, read this, and here's what it is. This is sort of a new up-and-coming thing." I just took advantage of people that I came after, and that's where I learned how to do it. I can run a convention. I can put on a special event. I can publish a brochure or a magazine. You're a generalist when you do that kind of thing.

When you started at Sierra Arts, what did you see as the biggest problems that you had to tackle?

Money, in all its forms. They had money stashed away. They had an endowment worth 1.3 million. A good-sized chunk of it was in a local financial company making 2 percent. Back then, 2 percent was embarrassingly awful. I'd started the process of getting their finances under control. There was some money over in FIB, First Interstate Bank, and this stuff was making no money at all.

I literally got, I think, five or seven financial advisors. Talk about glutton for punishment, wanting to invite financial advisors to talk to you about what they have

for you to do with your money. I brought them in, and each one did their own presentations. I am a natural with the money, plus I knew about some things because I'd been rubbing my elbows up against that kind of stuff. So, I understood money things.

We put \$300,000 with Prudential and a full million with a fixed-income money manager. They won't manage anything less than that, and that amount was the 70 percent we wanted in safer kinds of investments. I also put them through lots of red tape, because we had to adopt investment policies. They didn't have anything in writing saying, "Here's where we put our money. Here's how much money we are willing to invest in equities." Equities which are riskier than fixed-income bonds. We had all of that written down. It was 70/30, with 70 percent in bonds. We were worried about going any more than that.

Since I've left, they have changed that. What looked good for equity investments during the 1990s doesn't look so good in the first decade of the 2000s. I had to get financial advisors, get the money pulled out, and put it where it needed to go. I had to have the board adopt the investment policies as well.

There was one policy that we changed all the time. One of the most controversial votes I had the board take was whether or not I could count program endowment money toward the salaries of somebody working on our programs instead of just toward the program. It was a huge board meeting. It was very emotional. I squeaked under with one person who finally gave me the vote. In fact, it was Fran Harvey who did it. So I was able to use the money for people to run our programs.

It was very difficult to keep track of the money. I always believe in hiring somebody who knows more than I do. I was lucky—there was a CPA who was going through a divorce,

and he had child support and alimony to pay. He was the head of the money at the Washoe County School District, and was a CPA. He would come into my office at five in the morning. When I would get to work at eight or eight-thirty, here'd be all these nice neat notes from Mike. I would send him little Post-its asking "Okay, so what again is this over here?" [laughter] He'd write back, "Well, that is this." It was wonderful.

I think I lost him around my last year, year and a half, but he was fantastic. I couldn't start up from nowhere without that. He got me onto a Peachtree program, which was very complicated. They weren't on Quicken, QuickBooks, or anything like that. The CPA on my board, who was guiding them with their software purchases, advised us to get Peachtree. So, I had these really detailed financial reports to wade through every month.

I really felt when I got them where they had their money working for them and safely stashed with reliable money managers, which they quit all of that after I left.... They just bought mutual funds and stopped paying the money managers. I would put bucks on the fact they would have made better money my way, particularly with the market taking a downturn, which was to have their money actively managed like big huge holders have, particularly that million in the bonds. It's too bad that they made that decision, but at any rate, they did. It's history.

How long did the building renovation take?

We did it pretty fast. I was on a major beg for money, beg for painters, beg for anything. I would say within three years it was complete, but probably before then. We had rotating exhibits going through the gallery, which still go on in the Riverside. It went pretty fast.

The first night of our Oscars party—they've had them ever since.... The first one was held in our building, and I got somebody like Channel 8 to bring their truck, because that building on the corner of Court and Flint doesn't get the TV reception. We go and advertise this big thing—we're going to have big-screen TVs, we're going to put the serious Oscar watchers on the bottom level and the ones who want to party on the upper level. We're going to have all the TVs going with the Oscars, and we're going to have all these gourmet goodies to eat. There was no television reception, we wound up watching it on an East Coast feed. They got there with this truck, and I don't know how it happened. We had all kinds of wonderful food. I can remember I even begged assorted mustards from the Blue Bounty's Fish Market. That was our first night of Art and Oscars.

I think the Peppermill came along by the next year, maybe two years later, and they've been doing the Night of Art and Oscars ever since. They moved it to Atlantis, I noticed, more recently. I would not have continued the event. It's not a moneymaker, but it is a fun thing for people who are into film.

Robin Holabird, who was the state film person, was on our board. I got all the good ones on the board. After I was there seven years, there wasn't anybody I needed that I didn't have on the board. That just takes time. Some of it, was inherent from the lobbying skills that I had learned. I've always had this feeling that until somebody tells me no, I just plow ahead. People can say no, and I'll say, "Okay." Until you know that the city manager of Sparks won't be on your board, you ask him. And he said yes. Even though he left while I was still there...in fact, he left being city manager in Sparks and went out to Red Hawk. I still had Terry Reynolds on my board, and he was wonderful to call on

for any personnel issues. I could call him and he was just great. I didn't even need to convene my committee—I had a little Personnel Committee—because I could just pick Terry's brain. So, I would use different board members for different things.

How was the space used and what were the benefits of having the space?

Having space for small little arts groups, the portrait painters, the writers, and cultural groups like Ghiradi Shamaz which is one of the groups from India. There were four of them in the community. Ghiradi Shamaz was one, and they met in our building. We had a real mix. We had regular users. We required they attend a meeting once a year. They all had keys, and I did not put in an alarm system. I did have a fire alarm system.

Bruka used it for their children's performances. The portrait painters were there every Wednesday morning, come hell or high water. When the doors were closed, you knew that they were painting a nude model; they had somebody modeling in the nude. There was the Great Basin Basket Weavers—fiber artists, and basket makers. Oh, I used to love to go down there and see what they were doing. Wonderful things.

What was the layout of the building?

When you came through the front door, the Boy Scouts had had that as their big open reception area with counters where you could get your Cub Scout stuff. We turned that into a gallery. I knocked out a half wall that had had a hole in it to put plants in it—that never worked—and took that back to the wall. Where there had been a drinking fountain, I put that around the back, and we turned it into a little storage room. It was a big square

gallery with stairs off up to the left that took you up on to the upper level. Very Special Arts Nevada was up there and Chamber Orchestra was up there for a while.

If you went instead to the left up the stairs, the building basically ended there. If you went to the right, you got into another great big room (that was really inconvenient when I got there). It was just another great big huge monster of a thing. One of my architect board members sketched out these plywood cubicles like ones you could buy, except they were plywood and they had shelves. The whole inside of the building was painted the acoustic white that we used in the gallery. So we just did it all. We did all the plywood, and they brought those in. A board member found a carpenter friend of his who was moonlighting, and he built all that stuff for next to nothing.

Once I set that stuff up, I was able to have the conference table in a big area we left open. Then I had all these cubicles around the edge and everybody had their own space.

Of course, by then I'd gotten some new computers. The computers were no good. I think there was one that had been donated by IBM. Maybe it was good, but it's only as good as the software and finding somebody who knows how to use it. It took a while before we networked anything.

Then around in the back.... If you were to go into the gallery out of the exit door to the back, there was a long narrow area. I literally partitioned off one end and charged the Ballet a hundred bucks a month to be in there.

When they moved out, it worked really well, because I'd hired Rick Woods to do the *Encore* and the brochures. He was back there with all of his computers. He had one of those tables where they have light up underneath. He fixed a light table for the stuff that he worked on.

We actually even had a garage downstairs, and the bane of my existence was cleaning out that garage. You'd clean it and it'd be a mess again. We did store lots of things in there. The downstairs room had some pillars just like a church basement, a very tiny little kitchen on one end, and a couple of bathrooms off the hall. That room would work for the portrait painters, basket weavers, Bruka Theater to do a small children's production, or what have you.

There were two closed offices upstairs. There was also a long narrow room at the back of the big room with all the partitions in it. I took one of the offices and I had the program director take the other one. Everybody else had a cubicle. By then many of them had windows, all trimmed in red. [laughs] Oh, and I did yellow aluminum blinds in the windows that had the red crosshatch. That's where you saw the yellow besides the ceiling of the breezeway in front of the purple wall. It was really cool.

Equipment-wise, it was very poor when I got there. I just basically begged, borrowed, and stole. There was very little budget money for anything, so I got grants for everything, which was a difficult thing. I always did all of the grant writing, and sometimes my program director did. If I would hire somebody who said he could write grants, he would maybe do one and I would wind up writing grants myself. I knew my organization. I knew it from the bottom up, almost, because I'd inherited it in such disarray. Pretty much everything that had happened I'd been in the middle of, so I knew what their financial policies were. I knew what was going on.

The Arts in the Schools Program... Joan Dyer for all I know is still doing it. She did Arts in the School for Sierra Arts for many years—AIE, Arts in Education. She was really just a real pro on that. That program was still going

because Joan was still doing it. The difference back then was there were considerably fewer schools, and I had real trouble getting enough money as more schools were built. Each one-month residency was \$2,500, and I had real trouble getting enough money. They were just building more and more schools, so the percentage of schools we were in was getting lower and lower and lower. I'm sure it's still the case. Maybe they've altered it—they might do two weeks in a school to try to spread it out. They were integrating the arts education into the curriculum and providing the teachers with tools to use after they'd left. Our artists were wonderful.

What was the Sierra Arts Foundation mission when you took over as executive director?

When I took over, there was a very long, wordy one, if I remember correctly. I took to referring to Sierra Arts as the Chamber of Commerce for the Arts early on. There is not a mission written down with those words, but people seem able to kind of get a handle on what it is if you tell them that. Basically, the mission really did not change. We may have reworded things here or there, but it was always to support and promote the arts, both artists and arts organizations. There were many different things we did that helped us fulfill that supportive role.

We gave grants to artists and published the *Encore*, an arts publication. We expanded a lot when I was there. We did a lot more of what I would call social programming. We put artists into Wittenberg Hall, to work with at-risk kids, and that kind of thing.

The website outlines the focus of Sierra Arts as looking at teaching, caring, and supporting. Was that true of the time you were working at Sierra Arts?

We did not have those words. I don't know what they were referring to with "teaching," but certainly we did a lot of caring and supporting. Really, we did do a lot of educating, helping, and building community awareness of the arts and the role they play in people's lives and in this community—what the arts can mean to the community. If that is what they mean by the word "education," then, yes, we did do a lot of that.

Can you tell me about the staff and the board members?

Let me start with the staff. Her name at the time was Stephanie Sparks, and she was the only staff left by the time I got there. Everybody had either left or been dismissed, and she was trying to hold down the fort single-handedly until I got there. They had had an assortment of people in administrative roles, but Stephanie was the program director.

When I decided to get an assistant program director...I'm trying to think if that's when I hired Christine Orr, who's now with Channel 5. Jill Berryman, who's the current executive director, I put under contract, because I didn't have enough money to put her on as an employee. I had her do just some limited things, and when the program director job became available, I put her in that job.

I also hired Rick Woods, who's still in town. He is an artist but was not hired for that. He was editor of the *Encore* publication and he did all of our desktop publishing—brochures and flyers and what have you. Then after Jill became program director, there were a variety of different people who worked there a short while and left. Bill Kolton was there for quite a while, because he was there when I left. He's now with the Food Bank, I believe.

So there were a few of us doing a yeoman's job—a lot of stuff. There were many comings

and goings. It was very hard to keep the administrative assistant job filled.

I lucked out on accounting, because that's not one of my strong suits. My theory of managing organizations is when you're not strong in an area, you need a real genius in that area to make you look good, and I managed to hire Mike Schroeder. He did a wonderful job. It was the one thing I was mostly nervous about. I would try to make people do both the bookkeeping and the administrative assistant job but it was, too many skill sets, particularly in the salary range. I had very small salaries.

Who were some of the board members that you remember working with?

Joan Dyer. David Line was president of the board when I came on board. He, at the time, was with IBM Corporation (which he is not any longer). He did not stay on the board all that long. There were people who had been on the board for a long time. There was Fran Harvey. Fran was editor of the *Encore* publication back when we didn't have as much staff to do all of that. She kept that thing afloat for quite a few years before we made some changes and could move on. Patty Atcheson Melton, Karen Wells, Bob Gorrell, and Larry Henry, who is an architect in town.... There were forty people on that board.

Brad Van Woert was president for quite a few years. Robin Holabird, who headed up the film efforts on the state's behalf in northern Nevada, was on the board and still is.

The past presidents were: 1971 was Meryl Snyder; 1972 through 1974 was Charles Glattly; 1975 was Barbara Wright; 1976 was Barbara Feltner; 1977 through 1980 was George Aker, 1981 through 1983 was Thomas (Spike) Wilson. Dave Clark did construction in the area and he was president in 1984 and 1985. Robert Gorrell, from the

university, was 1986. J. Craig Sweeney was 1987 and 1988; Marie Elizalde was 1989; and Jennifer Satre was 1990. Then David Line was 1991 and 1992; Joan Dyer was 1993 through 1995; and Brad Van Woert was 1996 through 1998.

I finally just started doing the budget on a spreadsheet. Even when they were considering the budget for the next year, this is how it looked, because I had to drag monies from different endowments that were earmarked for certain things. It was the only way I could figure out to do it.

Donna Antraccoli was active on that board forever. She was at Hermitage Gallery when I knew her. I don't believe the Hermitage Gallery is any more, but she would be a key person. Sarah Bogart was a dance artist. Pat Blanchard was with RSVP back then. John Breternitz, who is now a county commissioner... John is with Q&D construction. He was on the board for quite a while.

Duffy Bride was on the board forever. She did community education for the school district. Tammy Cummings at KOLO she would have been new. Joe DeLapp was an artist with the university Art Department. Larry De Vincenzi—I don't know if he's still in town. Joan Dyer probably has more of a sense of history of everybody left standing.

I believe John Fowler was president for a while after I left. Pat Miller, who is the current vice president over at Channel 5.... N. Edd Miller was a past president of UNR before Joe Crowley got there (he moved back to town to retire and wound up on the board). Scott Stewart was with Wells Fargo, but I don't think he has been on the board for a while. Some of these people were newly on, so I think that gives you a pretty good idea.

What were some of the joys and challenges of having a forty-person board?

Well, the challenge was getting people to be involved and participate. The joy was with.... Michonne Ascuaga was on the board, and the joy was that there would be people like Michonne, who just simply couldn't make meetings but in a pinch was there to help us. Michonne helped start the Brewhaha or would deliver hors d'oeuvres to our Christmas party at the Art Center.

Our honorary board members are some of the old pillars who moved onto the honorary board because they weren't coming to board meetings, like Preston Hale, Sue Wagner, David Clark, and Kathy Bartlett. Carol Mousel actually served as an executive director back when they paid just a pittance.

There were challenges. I would probably get anywhere from maybe twenty to twenty-five or twenty-eight people at a board meeting, and that's unruly in its own size. That's a good-sized board meeting. We did a lot of paper-pushing, because every member of the board would get minutes with attachments for everything that was handed out. There were usually piles. We started color coordinating telling them, "Look for the blue paper in your pile."

I don't know how I would have done it with a small board. It would have had to be a different set of people, because these people were just too busy. Joan Dyer was an exception. She was amazing. John Fowler did all of our legal stuff. He's a lawyer in town, and whenever I had a legal question, I got John on the phone. There were people like that who were truly wonderful resources. Those were some of the benefits of having such a large board.

There is a frustration—you are throwing a great big festival in Wingfield Park and you need workers, and everybody has other things to do. So, you have to really work, but there was always a core group that bent over

backwards to be there and help. I hope that's always the case.

There were all the committees. This is where we did all our work. We provided grants to artists. There was a time earlier on when grants were also provided to arts organizations, and our money was somewhat limited. We had a small grants endowment that had been limited by the donor just to grants. Early on they would put other money with that to give grants. Well, we needed it to operate, so it turned out that only the grant endowment money was going out in grants. We started giving them only to artists, not arts organizations. A thousand bucks to an artist can make a difference. To some big huge art organization it wouldn't be much.

I know they still do that, because I read about it every once in a while that they have indeed given grants again. To some people when I got there, that was the main purpose and probably where the word "foundation" wound up in the name. There was a time when that was a really major part of the organization.

We had our gallery onsite, as they do now in the Riverside, and we did exhibitions. We did six a year, so they were two-month long exhibits. We threw great big receptions with wine to open each one. They were usually cutting-edge. I can remember one time we had an exhibit installed in the gallery where they painted all the walls of the gallery. We were very prissy about that. They were Hurst acoustic white from Kelly-Moore. They painted wanted all the walls of the gallery bright red, and it was a wonderful, wonderful exhibition. They set it up like a living room, and then around the sides they had pictures. Sitting on the coffee table in the living room were the stories of these people. About two thirds of them had died from AIDS or HIV, and some of them were living with it.

Then there was a wall they painted in blackboard paint. You can get that stuff that you can actually write on. People who came into the exhibit over the course of its duration there could write a little note on the little blackboard with a piece of chalk. That was an installation. You wouldn't find that anyplace else, except maybe at the university. The only other place you would find something really cutting-edge would be the university.

We did some things that were more mainstream. For instance, I don't remember who the artist was, but the sculptor made things out of mud, and they were wonderful. One of them was a full-sized body, and they had oversized feet. They were different. Some of them were little pieces. It was a wonderful exhibition of animals and people that were not like how animals and people normally look, but you knew what they were.

We had special activities, and community events. We had events that were arts or culture-focused, and we had events that were fundraisers. An example of an event they just had...a Night of Art and Oscars started when I was there. There were artists that actually made works that were then voted on. The winning one was on display at Harrah's for a year after the event.

That now has evolved to where they call it A Night of Art and Oscars, but it's different. We always had a dinner. They still have a big dinner. We spent a number of years at the Peppermill, and I noticed in the paper they're at the Atlantis now. They have everything from martini bar to a full dinner. We always had big-screen TVs.

The first year of that we had in our Art center. Then from there on out, we went to various places around town. The event would be to honor the arts that are film, but also make money. The event didn't make a whole lot of money. They're still calling it a Night of

Art and Oscars, but I don't think people are creating art pieces. I don't know they're not. I just haven't read anything about it.

Arts In Education probably is one of the most longstanding programs. It was there forever. Joan Dyer did it single-handedly for years, visiting the elementary schools back when there weren't so many. We could probably get from one third to half of them every year with a program that lasted a full month and that provided the teachers with information on how to integrate their curriculum into whatever the art form was. It wasn't just learning how to draw pretty pictures. It could be an artist teaching them how to make their own cameras, how to take pictures with them, how to have a darkroom—the whole thing. It could be music, although we usually didn't do that, because music at least had its own program. It was better back then than it is now. The program focused on the other arts that were starting to be pushed out of the way back when I was in the arts.

We would put these artists in classrooms. It took a lot of work. It took a lot of lesson plans and evaluations. The program was done way aboveboard. Although I don't know that Joan isn't still doing it, I would hope for her sake that there is somebody else helping, like a staff member, because the kind of volunteer that Joan Dyer was doesn't exist a whole lot anymore. These people are out working for a living. Joan was totally dedicated.

Our arts exhibits in our gallery were going when I got there, but we expanded and started doing it community-wide. We would put exhibits in coffeehouses, bank lobbies, and different places. I believe they're still doing the gallery for the City Hall. I think they're doing the libraries that have art shows as well. So that was always a really big thing.

Putting out the *Encore* was considered a service to the community, because there was

no other publication that told you for the next month or two what was going to be happening. It was a twenty-four-page newspaper tabloid with audition opportunities and calls to artists to apply for grants or exhibition possibilities. It had a wonderful assortment of articles on the various art things going on, which never did anything but grow and become more plentiful. That was before Artown started. So that was *Encore*.

We did festivals. We did a cultural folklife festival that I was especially proud of in Wingfield Park. It included everything from bagpipe players to gospel choir singers to Irish cloggers to hula dancers. We also had their food, so they would have food booths. They would have demonstration areas where people could sit down and learn how to weave their own Hawaiian placemat out of palm fronds. We did that a lot. In fact, it covered two days when we started it, and then it went down to one.

We also, when I first got there, we did a lot of things one time. People would look forward to what Sierra Arts was doing because it was never the same thing as the year before. Probably my first three or four years there we did that.

Stephanie Sparks, who was there when I got there, was the program director and she was really determined to do that. They had the Year of the American Craft, and I can remember when she got in her car and drove to Elko to pick up a saddle that had been hand-made. The owner trusted it within an inch of Stephanie's life and she brought it back. It was on display in our gallery, along with really wonderful crafts from all over the state of Nevada. She did a beautiful job on that.

So we would have events, and then they would go off into the sunset and something else would take its place. That does not appear to have happened in the last ten years that I

can see. I see the same things over and over. Our fundraiser events—Brewhaha and Arts and Oscars—are still coming every year. Every once in a while I'll notice something new, but then I don't see it coming back the next year. Maybe it failed, who knows. They do have a lot of things they do every year now that pretty well keeps the calendar full, I would imagine.

Can you tell me about the application process for the grants given to individual artists?

We had a Grants Committee made up of board members, who took the job very seriously. We maintained an artist's registry so we would send to every artist on our registry the announcement that the grant application time was coming. We would take in applications, and we could get sixty to seventy applications easily and be able to give out eighteen \$1,000 grants. It was that competitive. Within reason, they tried to recognize all different disciplines. There were dancers, movement artists, writers, and poets—not just visual artists, necessarily.

Over the years, I think we made a difference. One of the neat things about that program, which I suspect remains the same but I can't say for sure, is that there were no strings attached. So if an artist got a \$1,000 grant and wanted to go buy a new sofa, that artist could do that. The grant was truly theirs. It was acknowledging that they had a special gift and we were giving them a grant as a result of that. It was always one of the favorite programs that Sierra Arts had.

There would be financial struggles and what have you, but when we gave the money to the artists, it was just an all around feel-good thing. We would do an exhibition in the gallery of grants artists, which they still do. They give some to students—\$500

scholarships to UNR students that hadn't graduated yet. They recognized them.

Are there any artists who received grants that stand out in your memory?

There's been so many. Certainly Martina Young, who now is having body problems. She is a phenomenal dance artist and a very good literary artist as well. She is an incredibly talented woman, and lives in the Riverside Artist Lofts.

Was that a typical amount—\$18,000?

It was. It was a lot less than it used to be, and it was very bothersome for people who thought our main reason to exist was to give out grants, let me tell you. It's just the way it was, though.

You had said that the money was no strings attached that they could spend it on what they wanted. There was a grant artist exhibit. Was there any other obligation that they had?

Not really. We encouraged them, as much as we could, to continue creating. Once an artist, always an artist. They don't change. I have a son who's a musician. He got his degree in music performance, and he went and got an MBA and he's got a manager position. Inside where his soul hangs around, that kid—he's forty-four years old—is definitely an artist first—a musician. It doesn't go away ever.

How well attended were the exhibits, and was the general community supportive?

Not as much as they should have been. It was also highly competitive, like the grants. There would be many, many applicants wanting to exhibit in the Sierra Arts Gallery.

There were only six a year at the time, plus the grant artists also had an exhibition.

We did wine receptions. We did PR the best we could. When I hired Rick Woods, a part of his job was to get the word out about what was opening in the gallery. Eventually it expanded. We needed to get the word out about what was opening at City Hall and libraries and what have you. They just were not that well attended, but some were better than others.

The grant artists' exhibition was very well attended, but people were there to get their money. They got their checks that night, and their friends and families would come. We'd have a pretty packed gallery. If we had thirty to forty people show up to an opening that was considered pretty normal.

Was there every any cost to attend any of the exhibits?

Pretty much everything Sierra Arts does is at no cost to the public, with the exception of its fundraising activities. It really bends over backwards to enable that the arts flourish.

The mission statement was "Sierra Arts Foundation is the regional community arts organization that supports and advocates awareness, appreciation, excellence, accessibility, and development of all the arts." The word "education" wasn't in there. They made it shorter. I believe there was a new incarnation of this that has now been replaced with yet something else since I left. That's what it was when I was there.

What were the other art education programs that Sierra Arts was involved in?

We did what we started calling Arts Alternatives. Arts Alternatives would go into Wittenberg Hall, which is now the Jan Evans

Detention Center. Yes. She was still alive back then, so it was Wittenberg Hall. We went to Washoe High—anyplace that there were populations that were a little more at risk, and we would do the same kind of thing. Sometimes we could even get more creative [with Arts Alternatives] than in Arts In Education. [With Arts In Education] you were dealing with children in a classroom. I can remember one time at Wittenberg Hall one of the artists had all the kids decorating. They painted the doors to their rooms where they stayed. We learned a lot about gang symbolism so that we could be sure that that wasn't in there.

We did work hard on arts for at-risk populations, for lack of a better term. There was usually potential funding that was a little broader-based because it was more of a social service focus. All of a sudden, instead of only arts funding, you could get funding to help kids.

We also did concerts in the Atrium. Concerts in the Atrium had been going forever when I got there. It was every Friday in the Atrium of Airport Gardens on Terminal Way. It was a one-hour program. We were very particular about that. We had only the best musicians—people out of the university—and they would do lectures as well as playing. Our audiences would bring their brown-bag lunches, and sometimes we would actually have lunch. There was a deli there and people could buy sandwiches. They are still doing something like that that's a little different. I think it's in the gallery, but they're still doing something like that.

An idea that I had, that was one of the things that I didn't get going, was doing it in long-term nursing facilities. I think they may be doing some things there, because that's definitely a growing at-risk population that would benefit from the kind of thing that we did.

Then we started Youth Artworks. Youth Artworks was a collaborative project with Sierra Arts, the Nevada Museum of Art, and the Reno Police Department. The idea, initially, which also grew and changed, was to employ graffiti artists and teach them how to paint with something other than a spray can and teach them that they could actually maybe have a living in that. The Police Department found us the kids. They pretty well knew every kid. They might not be able to catch them in the act, but they pretty well know who was who out there. They were not looking for real troublemakers. They were looking for kids they thought were “salvageable.” We relied on the Police Department to pick which kids were going to take part in this summer program.

Their education occurred at the museum in the museum school—how to write a résumé and how to market yourself. One of our first projects was a mural. They are mostly outdoor murals. We had a project...I’m trying to think if it was the one on Wedekind Road. It was one that the city of Reno had to approve. So these kids were taught how to make a presentation, and they had to go before the Reno City Council to pitch their thing. When they came out, it was described to me, not one of them hit the ground. They were ten feet off the ground. They were so excited because they had done a phenomenal job. They had been extremely well educated about how to pull this off. So it’s a lot more than just art. It’s so much more than that.

It then spun off, just about the time I left or a little before, and became its own 501(c)3. So now Youth Artworks is a part of this community as a separate entity. With funding drying up all over the place, some of these small groups I worry about. There’s a mural on Plumas by the tennis courts—that was one of our first ones. There’s one on the

water tank north of town, and one out off of Mill Street. It’s in the middle of the airport, so you have to be in an airplane, on the left side, when you’re going toward Mill to taxi in order to see it out the window.

The first time we did it, we had one kid get a commission to do another. In fact, I think he got two, from businesses in the area. We had another one who wound up in art school in New Mexico. You would not believe what happened to these kids who thought all they could do was graffiti. The minute they discovered what they could do with an airbrush, well the rest of that was child’s play.

They were paid salary. They were paid for going to school, and they had to adhere to very strict rules. If they screwed up then we said, “Sayonara. There’s your lesson.” If they did really well, they could come back the next year and be one of the...there was an older, almost mentor level. They were always paid to learn and to paint. It was an outstanding program.

How did the artists become involved in Sierra Arts and how did you convince them to do these classes?

Well, they didn’t take much convincing. When I first got there, I think Sierra Arts was perceived as weak, because it was not doing real well then. Over the course of my seven years, it became really quite a big deal to be considered good enough by Sierra Arts that they would hire you to go and work with the kids in Wittenberg or in elementary schools. We also paid our instructors. So there was never any arm-twisting. It was a matter of making phone calls. Because the arts organizations and artists were maintained in a master list, which was never complete because it’s in flux all the time.... We had that list, so if we needed to put out a call because we had

gotten a grant to do something for at-risk kids, we could shoot it right out.

There was word of mouth, and we'd print it in the *Encore* as an opportunity for us. We were picky, and certainly those artists that went into the schools, all had degrees of their own. There are a lot of artists that don't that are still wonderful artists, but I think that may have been a requirement. Sierra Arts always kept really high standards and I hope they've continued to do that. We always were proud of keeping very high standards for all our programs.

Did Sierra Arts ever offer any classes for artists?

Sometimes we'd have workshops, but not direct hands-on stuff. We might get the word out that there was an opportunity at TMCC, or, at the museum. Things would happen in the building, because we had over fifty organizations that met there. So, say, the portrait painters or the Great Basin Basket Weavers... [They did] marvelous stuff. They would do a thing where they would teach people to make baskets. I think all of that kind of thing continues, it just doesn't continue at Sierra Arts anymore. Now that they're in a different building, there are different parking issues and there are different space issues. We had a nice big room downstairs with restroom facilities and a small kitchen. We had cultural festivals and things that would be put on downstairs that I don't think they have space for that now.

Can you tell me about fundraising for Sierra Arts?

We had members—not all organizations do but we did. We had both corporate and individual members. We would budget every year for a total amount from them. We had a

little bit of money from facilities rental, but most of the money came from grants. Back then the.... It's now called the Nevada Arts Council, but it had a longer name. They just shortened it to Nevada Arts Council. They never had enough money to fully fund grants. By the time I left in '99, the max that we were permitted to apply for was \$24,000, and the only people who got it had to get perfect scores on their grant applications. I'm proud to say I got it. In fact, I think I was the only one who got full funding my last year there, because I would get really good scores on my applications.

From what I read in the paper, the Nevada Arts Council is going to be lucky to stay on their feet. They are trying to swallow them up into some other department. I am sure they are doing everything they can to have grants to give out, but they also gave out things for folk artists and fellowships. There were other things that the Nevada Arts Council did besides the grants to organizations.

Then there were corporate foundation grants. There were private foundation grants. For 1998 and 1999, I had budgeted a total from government sources of \$184,800—that's a lot. There was \$5,500 from corporate foundations and \$42,000 from private foundations.

Fundraising accounted for \$59,500, almost \$60,000. We had advertising income for the publication. So we had interest and dividends—\$169,000, because we had the endowments and they were healthy when I left. I had heard that that is no longer the case, but when I got there, their endowments totaled 1.3 million. My first year on the job was a matter of getting investment policies adopted and getting that money relocated where it could really bring in some income. Then I had to get the board to adopt a policy for how they would draw off of those so that we weren't being jerked around by the interest

rate. We needed to know at the beginning of the year when I'm doing this thing how much we could take.

So, the operations endowment this year was going to be \$65,000, the programs endowment was going to be about \$70,000, and the grants endowment...we had to add to it. I think we must have taken \$10,000 out of the grants endowment but then we took the rest of it out of the program endowment to get \$18,000. I do remember it was \$18,000. It was very complicated, and once those endowments.... I would be speaking out of turn to really have any knowledge at all about what's happened since I left, but once they started nipping into those in a more aggressive manner, that can spiral, and particularly the way the market.... The market was wonderful when I was in there, so I left them with endowments of 1.5 million.

Since then, I know that they've sold the building that I had estimated at about \$500,000. They may have sold it for less than that. Then they turned around and bought the Riverside for \$300,000 and had to build out their piece of it, so I'm sure they spent quite a bit of money on that. I believe they've gotten another endowment. I heard from one of the board members that somebody had died and left them money. That was nice, but I've got an uncomfortable feeling they are using that to live on.

Do you have any sense of what your total operating budget was, including staff, and what your total expenditure for the year would have been?

Our operating budget was \$136,000. From operational endowments there was \$65,000, and \$70,000 from programs. There was \$10,000 from grants, and \$28,000 from Brewhaha. It was an overall budget

of \$561,000. That gives you a pretty good balance. Who knows how that has shifted.

What kind of fundraising events did you have?

Brehaha. Brehaha came about when one of my employees who wasn't there a real long time, but she was great... her name was Ace Bailey, and she said to me after a Rib Cook-off one year.... She'd just been out there, and the Nugget, who pretty well does that Rib Cook-off out there at the Victorian Square, had gotten the band Mumbo Gumbo. She said, "Ah, what you need is to get Mumbo Gumbo." I'd mentioned it. I'd pulled together some board members and we were talking about what we could do for fundraising. I even remember it was Scott Stewart, who was with Wells Fargo Bank, who said, "Oh, if you could get Mumbo Gumbo that would be really cool. You know, organizations do a lot of beer tastings as fundraisers."

The arts community was still into wine tastings, ever so proper. He says, "We need a really wild, great beer-sampling party and some great music like Mumbo Gumbo."

Well, Michonne Ascuaga, who was on the board, but didn't really have time to come to meetings... I called Michonne and said, "I need a phone number for Mumbo Gumbo." That's all I really needed.

She says, "Oh, don't be so hasty. Let me talk to my dad. I think maybe the Nugget would be interested in this."

So what ultimately happened was we partnered.... I had a philosophy that it's great to be charitable, but they were in business and they couldn't afford to be charitable forever. I remember Joan Dyer saying to me, "We'll be lucky if we have that event for three years because then they'll move on to something else." The Nugget got half the take and we got half the take. We got certain things. I took

charge of the raffle, so we took 100 percent of the raffle for Sierra Arts. Our first year, the tickets were \$12 apiece. We sold out to 2,000 people and had long lines of people who wanted to get in and couldn't. They were saying "We'll work for tickets."

So the whole time I was there... I can't remember what the first year was, but I think it was 1994 or 1995. It's been going ever since, and, of course, now the tickets are outrageous and they've got VIP seating. You can actually get special seating nearer to the dance floor. We used every square inch of dance floor the Nugget had. We literally blanketed the Rose Ballroom and dance floor.

The Nugget was a wonderful partner, and we would meet.... I kept a hold of that for myself. There were some things I kept for myself, like grants. I did most of the grant writing, because I knew the organization all up here in my brain. I knew how to put it on paper in a way that I positioned it to appeal to whatever that grantor was looking for. I kept the Brewhaha to myself, too.

Everybody in the whole office got involved before it was over, because it's a huge project. Almost every board member got involved, because we had to staff the event. I had three or four money runners going between the money stations and the safe downstairs at the Nugget. We had people taking tickets. We had people selling raffle tickets—just the whole thing.

Then we paid the expenses of Nugget security. The Nugget had a couple of food areas, and they kept 100 percent of that. It was beer-drinking food—popcorn and hotdogs and that kind of thing.

People just danced their little hearts out. We had an opening band. I'm trying to think if it was before Mumbo Gumbo came on or maybe during their break that we would draw for the raffles. I would usually have about

five prizes. Everybody wanted the one that was dinner for four in beautiful downtown Gerlach at Bruno's, with limousine service to and from Reno, so you could get drunk and it didn't matter. I had that almost every year. There may have been a year that I didn't have that, but John Ascuaga... Michonne says, "Oh, my dad's good friend with Bruno. We'll throw in a limousine." They were great partners.

I had some really great prizes. They weren't your basic dinner for two at the fancy restaurant. I had llama-trekking with a picture of you with your very own llama. I had kayaking in San Juan Islands up in Washington—just unusual things. We did pretty well with the raffle, but pretty well would mean \$5,000 to \$6,000. Everything adds up, though.

So those were the two main fundraising events. Those were huge, to do those two things. They are huge, and they occurred close together.

When is Brewhaha?

It's usually in January, and then you turn around and have the Academy Awards in March. If you're lucky, it's in March. So, they came real close together, and we were certainly busy all the time, whether we were doing something that was going to bring in money or not.

We milked the memberships. When I started, there had been not one membership letter mailed to anybody to say, "Thanks for being a member. Send us your money again for next year." For eighteen months, nothing had gone out. I was counting on \$27,000 from individuals and \$10,000 from corporate. The corporate had already started going down. We had a lot of corporate memberships, but we show them as in-kind. They would give us something, and we would give them

something, like advertising free in the *Encore*. We had \$37,000 of memberships, which is better than zero.

What were the membership fees and what did being a member entitle you to?

They used to print it in the *Encore*. We used to try to find ways of saying it that sounded better. Basically, you got a warm fuzzy feeling because you were supporting Sierra Arts, but you also got the *Encore* publication mailed to your home. You got all the announcements of all receptions, exhibitions, festivals, and events that went on throughout the year. You got notified personally about all of that stuff. That was a biggie. Now I've seen them do things like if you give at this level, you're going to get two free Brewhaha tickets, and they're trying to do some other things. Back when I did it, it was more a warm fuzzy feeling that you got, and the inside scoop about when and where things were, so you could get reservations before they sold out. That Brewhaha sold out every year. That was, as much as anything, thanks to Bruce Van Dyke [phonetic] and the X. They were great partners too.

Do you remember how many paying members you had by the time you left?

I don't, but it was never what it should be. A family membership was \$60 for the year, and we would take students at \$20 or \$25, and individuals were \$35 and maybe \$40 by the time I left. So when we got a check for a hundred bucks, we were really pleased. It would take ten of those just to get a thousand dollars. So it's slow work, but memberships were every bit as much for the PR value of having that many people who knew about us and cared enough to give us their money.

We could send things to them and we could count on them to show up at stuff. It was more than just bringing in money; it was cultivating our own little cadre of arts ambassadors out there—people who knew what we did and supported what we did.

I can't remember dollar-wise that much. Corporates could be \$250, \$500, or \$1,000. We had different levels. Oftentimes it would be a trade-out. It would show somebody gave \$2,500, but really what they gave was \$2,500 worth of something.

What kind of support did you have from the city of Reno, and did you partner with the city at all?

They retained us to handle their galleries. We did Arts on the Streets, which was another thing we did that was great fun. We set tents up all over Reno, and then we put out the publicity. There were flyers at each tent that would show you were the next one was. This one might be making jewelry and this one would be painting a picture. So we had all these artists on the streets, and that was in cooperation with the city.

We established some really good solid political alliances while I was there. In fact, I had all three... I had Terry Reynolds, who was city manager of Sparks. He was on the board for quite a while. Charles McNeeley came on the board shortly before I left, maybe in that last year. He was city manager of Reno. Katie Simon, who's still the county manager, was wonderful. She was the one who introduced me to Charles McNeeley so that we could get them to throw in some money on the Artists Lofts and to get the Artspace people out here from Minnesota (which we certainly did).

There was a loosely-begun arts commission called the City 2000 Arts Commission. That was the city's first attempt to do anything

really serious with the arts, and they didn't really believe in it like they came to believe in it. I think the mayors across the United States all figured out at about the same time that they could possibly save their downtowns if they would just embrace the arts and use partnerships with the arts to bring their downtowns alive. This is what we did, and which had been done in a number of communities.

Jeff Griffin, who was mayor at the time, told me that by far the largest committee in the National Organization of City Mayors was the Arts and Culture Committee. Everybody wanted to be on that one, so all of a sudden it was real popular. The City 2000 Arts Commission, which was struggling along, did their own exhibitions. Then we would hang it. We would run it for them, really, come to think of it. Their call for their exhibitions at City Hall, we would run it and do that, and then they would pay us a fee to do that.

Artown was called Uptown Downtown Artown its first year, and key people in the arts started getting together and talking about that. The people from the City Arts Commission certainly were major in that, as were we. We had different functions, but in some ways I think we overlapped. Then eventually, after I retired, they moved out of the Stewart Street Annex Building from City Hall and moved into the McKinley Arts and Culture Center in the old McKinley School.

Christine Fey heads up the art commission. They were going to get rid of it. If you get that arts community riled up, oh, boy. They apparently got riled up. There were a lot of people there just said, "This cannot be." You don't know how long it will last or what they will roll that into. They might think, "Gee, maybe we could do Artown with a bunch of volunteers."

Artown now is not a city thing. It is its own nonprofit entity. They will keep going, but they're going to struggle with sponsorships like everybody else, like the balloon races. The economy is making it really hard for nonprofits to keep their heads above water.

Were there any other organizations or key partnerships that you remember working with closely while you were there?

The Americans for the Arts organizations, which had a different name.... That was an important connection, and we always went out of our way to get to that convention in the summer—at least two or three of us—because it was just a wonderful connector that we could get information from. They were great.

Locally, the Nevada Museum of Art was always doing wonderful things, even before they built the new building. They were just really a class act. I can remember when I was trying to decide what paint color to paint the gallery in the Art Center, and I think Turkey Stremmel was one of the people on the committee to help us decide what colors to use. So we would tap into working with all kinds of people. I would try to at least make the City 2000 Arts Commission meetings and sit in and see what they're talking about.

For the Artists Lofts, which was definitely a partnership, I was working arm and arm with Pam Barrett, a city staff member. We were at all the hearings and really worked tightly together, and it was miraculous. Looking back on it, I cannot believe we pulled that off.

Ever since that and Artown started taking off, there was a major shift in attitude, at which point it's possible then to step back and say "Let's you and them do it." That's kind of what happened. Once other people caught on that the arts could be our salvation, it wasn't

necessary for us to be right in the middle of everything.

I can remember with the movie theater—highly controversial.... On the river side where you enter the theater, there are little glass-front places. One of the city people got it through his head that was going to be artist studios. I'm saying, "Well, I don't know what artists you think are going to like to live in a fishbowl, but I'm telling you I don't know any." There weren't even bathrooms in those units, I don't think. There are artists who will go to Arts on the Streets and let people watch them do whatever they're doing. We even had blacksmiths from Virginia City one year doing stuff on the patio in front of the Pioneer. But, generally, artists are a sensitive lot and they need their space and they need the environment that's conducive to creating their art. I would not imagine sitting in a fishbowl would be it. [laughs] All of a sudden, everybody wanted arts for everything, because they discovered it was really a good thing.

I would say the biggest disappointment, which remains the case, is that the Lear Theater has never been able to get off the ground. Of course, in this economic climate, it can only be worse than it was. That came about from three of my board members talking over wine. We didn't do wine receptions after board meetings, but we did at the annual meeting. We would go downstairs and have a four o'clock board meeting, and then the annual meeting would be upstairs in the gallery and we would have wine.

Three board members—N. Edd Miller, who had been the president of UNR, and Etta Morrison, who is no longer with us and was a neat lady... the other young gal who left was an interior decorator who moved to Seattle.

The three of them, over wine in my gallery, decided to create a theater coalition. Etta was a member of the Christian Science Church,

and her good friend Moya Lear was a member, so one thing led to another and they were off and running. It was like, "Go get 'em!" Theater in this town was the weakest discipline of all the arts disciplines when I was working there. They're still struggling, looking for places to perform. So [having the Lear Theater] would have been nice. I would like to think that at some point it will surface, but I can only imagine what they're going through in this economic climate,

You've mentioned the shift in attitude in Reno around the time Artown was getting going. Was it in any way related to the Artists Lofts?

The Artists Lofts were ahead of the curve. The Artists Lofts started giving it a feel. All of a sudden, there's coffeehouses and there's other little galleries and River Arts Gallery. There are just other things. Bruka Theater got their roots down good and firm, right on the river area. Then you throw in a kayak park and you're over the top.

Certainly we were ahead. By the time they were built out, I think everybody was feeling pretty positive. They were discovering the arts by then. But when I started, no.

What were some of the major changes and accomplishments while you were at Sierra Arts?

Well, I got asked that when I retired, and I gave them a really boring answer. When you are the executive director, at least for me, I was not as program-focused as I was business-focused. When I got there, they had no health insurance for employees, so you couldn't keep employees. I never had much money to spend, so I could never give real high salaries, but I could try to make up for that in other ways.

So the last thing that happened as I walked out the door seven years later, the very next

day, their retirement plan kicked in. I'd had no retirement there. I did those kinds of things. What that does is provide stability for an organization. As your elected leadership comes and goes and rotates on and off, you at least have a good solid foundation. From the business perspective, that was huge. They would be in a terrible place if they had not got Sierra Arts up and running more like a business with benefits for the employees and that kind of thing. That is not artsy, but it's one of the things that I did that was really important.

Certainly, I think, the landmark change came when we secured the funding for the Riverside. After I retired, poor Jill got stuck having to fight the asbestos and god knows what else, but I think that was a major turning point. It ultimately put Sierra Arts out of their Art Center and into the downtown area.

Certainly the variety of things we did, from all different kinds of festivals to much of what I've shared. I can remember one thing—we had these great wearable art pieces. This artist had painted jackets in women's sizes. Oh, gorgeous. There were so many neat things that we did.

I do think that the organization had respect when I left. I'm not sure it had as much. I won't say it wasn't respected. It was. I mean, there were people who had given years and years of their lives to keeping that organization up and going. I do think we had gained a degree of respect beyond what they had had before. We had pulled off the Artists Lofts, and, in the meantime, we had grown and were giving all these different kinds of festivals. We were visible. We were visible, and that's half the battle.

I was looking into the Pioneer Center, and I came across this Reno Performing Arts board that took over managing Pioneer from

the Reno-Sparks Visitors and Convention Authority. Were you involved in that?

No. I don't remember that, but when that big domed building with the gold roof was built, it supposedly was a convention center. So it was a convention center, and then there was this huge snafu when they wanted to build a new one way out of town where at the time there were no hotels. Why would you put a convention center where there's no place for people to stay? But they did. I'm not sure what all the politics was around that. I mean, I watched the Pioneer. They had their own Broadway series. Usually it was just a venue and other organizations rented the space for whatever they put on there.

John Sheldon [phonetic] was the executive director of the Pioneer for many years, and Willard is outstanding. He is a great big huge guy, and worked for the Peppermill. He's got to be six and a half foot tall. He's been running it and, my husband says, is doing a great job.

See, this is the piece Joan Dyer could give you. She knows about that whole thing. Sierra Arts had that high-rise building and they were going to make a campus. It was going to have the Pioneer Center and it was going to have all this arts stuff. I think it was called Block C or something. It was before me, but it was huge.

Spike Wilson was heading up Sierra Arts at the time. He was a lawyer, and he was doing all of the figuring. They even had blueprints around my office that that must have been the \$100,000 that they spent before they gave up on it. They had beautiful plans for all of this, though. The concept had been flushed out a lot.

What was Sierra Arts doing for Artown when it was getting started?

Artown got every arts organization in the area that was already doing stuff. Heaven knows we were doing a ton of stuff. They did not create anything other than what we were all doing anyway. They marketed it as one event called Artown, or Uptown, Downtown, Artown. What we contributed to Uptown Downtown Artown, was an exhibit that we had one block off the park at our Arts Center. We contributed people to perform for different things in the park. The ballet was one of the performances. So, they had the arts that were already going on, they gave it a title, and it became Artown.

Now they have separate people and businesses who give money, which, between you, me, and the gatepost, makes it really hard on the artists in the small little arts organizations. They don't get the money because the such-and-such bank has decided they're going to give their \$10,000 to Artown. It used to be they could give \$2,500 apiece to the Philharmonic to do stuff in the park. Now they couldn't do that because they're giving it all to Artown.

I feared that would happen, and that appears to be what happened. When you see a flyer that there's an exhibit coming up at the museum or there's a performance coming up at the Grand Sierra (and that one you have to pay for)... probably two-thirds to three-quarters of what you get in Artown is free, it's not [actually] free. Those organizations have to pay to produce whatever it is they're producing for Artown. They are not getting as much help because the money is all going to Artown, which is promoting this one big thing.

It's an interesting balance, and I don't know how that's changed. I know that Artown has become extremely strong, and with all of that corporate money coming in, that much more so. I suspect, knowing what I do of

small performing arts groups, that they're struggling. I can almost guarantee you.

Understanding the argument of Artown siphoning off funding that would go to other people, is there any benefit that the organizations get being under this marketing umbrella?

Oh, absolutely. It is *the* benefit. Your audiences grow because they're going to a "free event." Even though it will be our secret that it wasn't free. They go to wherever for this free event, and so you get people exposed to different parts of the arts that maybe they would otherwise not be exposed to. It's huge the PR that you get and the marketing that is done. Don't try to do anything in Reno in July that isn't part of Artown, because you can't get it advertised.

What was around in 1995, or whenever Artown got going, for them to organize around? Has that changed at all over the last fifteen years?

We used to say [there were] a couple hundred events. What that meant was if you had a play and somebody's going to put that play on five times, that's five events. So there were a couple hundred events, and every organization who wanted to was able to be a part of it.... I think they got a little fussier than take just any old amateur whatever. It's a touchy balance because you can bring in the Martha Washington Dance Troupe and have the most phenomenal performance, but where's the little local dance group and how do you balance that out? The quality of their product is not equal, but yet you want to encourage and nurture along the smaller up-and-coming ones.

They are more professional now, and certainly they do things at other times of the

year. Back in '95, it was only that one month. Now you might get a little something over into August or something starts up in June. It was just July, and much of it was in Wingfield Park. I could remember saying, "Gee, I went to a music festival once in Montana in Kalispell, and I went to Denny's for lunch and there was this stringed trio in there playing. It was wonderful. I think that's what we want here. We want it to be that month when you go into wherever to get a cup of coffee, there's somebody there performing." That's a community.

That was kind of the goal. I mean, that's what I was always pushing for. I just thought that would be so neat, that you were so surrounded. In that community they even did gospel choirs and brought them into the football stadium, for heaven sake. It was great.

Why was July chosen?

It was the one month that didn't have something else, and it worked. It worked for the arts organizations. The one event we had to kind of work around... we were trying to do all free events, and the Philharmonic had their Pops on the River, which is their fundraiser. You pay to go to it, in the middle of Wingfield Park, which is where most of the Artown stuff took place. We worked around that by simply saying, "We're just going to let them have it." It's still a phenomenally fun, great arts event in the park. The Phil is there and they play music. So we worked around it.

There are other things now that you pay for. I believe the goal for them is to try to get as much free or extremely low cost events as they can so that overall they can say of these four hundred events (which is about what they're now saying there are), two-thirds to three-quarters, are free.

What's happened now is you start getting Andrew Lloyd Webber events. You get these things, and they start to put them on in July because it goes into the Pioneer or it goes onstage at the Grand Sierra. That has changed a lot since I left.

What other things are you currently involved with that I haven't asked you about?

ART— Ageless Repertory Theatre. Musically, I sing in the church choir. I did one opera chorus. Boy, I won't ever do that again. Oy yi yi. *Aida*—oh, my god. It was in Italian, and I'm not good.... First off, I'm not good at foreign languages, and secondly, I am not good at reading music. I read it, but my rhythm is off. It's like a need I pacemaker for music. I'm just not real good. I'm an amateur in the true sense. I'm a true church choir singer.

I know you've been involved a little bit in Sheep Dip.

Oh, yes—Sheep Dip. Ageless Repertory Theatre is the biggie right now. Sheep Dip is the biggie come January every year. We just had our March Sheep Dip dinner at the Elks Club. Eighty-four people showed up. Usually it's just leadership—twenty-three to twenty-five people. So we're off and running for the next year's show in January 2012.

What do you like about doing Ageless Repertory Theatre?

A number of things. For one, we've got a loyal audience that keeps following us around, and it's a kick. You see these familiar faces and new faces as well, but that's always fun. When you start having problems memorizing lines, there is just nothing as much fun as a readers' theater, which is what Ageless Repertory

Theatre is. You don't have to memorize lines, but we become our characters. We literally become our characters, and it's just a hoot. It's just an absolute hoot.

Most of the ones we do are comedies. Nothing is as funny as the one they did last week. Oh, my god, it was just hysterical. We do mostly comedies, and the audiences just absolutely love it. They forget that we are not in costume. There's more variety because we're readers. The audiences are getting to see at least a couple different plays a month and sometimes more. In Artown, we'll be doing two or four evening performances and eight daytime performances. We're doing a lot during Artown.

Are there plays that you've especially enjoyed or characters that you've liked playing?

Well, my favorite is a Sheep Dip character, Martha Stewed. That is a drunk Martha Stewart. Oh, I had a blast playing Martha. In fact, I went through separation anxiety when Sheep Dip was over. I thought, "I miss Martha." They wrote her into two other skits, but nothing was like the first one. Oh, my gosh, it was great.

Three weeks ago, Ron and I just completed a play that featured just the two of us, and it now has become our signature play. It's written by Bernard Slade. He wrote *Same Time Next Year*. This is why I like readers' theater. I remember stuff. *Same Time Next Year* was a movie with Alan Alda where he's married to somebody and she's married to somebody. Their eyes meet across a crowded room, and for the rest of their lives once a year on that same weekend, they meet in Mendocino. The two people comprise the entire play. We do have a husband and wife in Ageless Repertory Theatre who have done *Same Time Next Year*.

The one that Ron and I did is called *Special Occasions*. He's Michael and I'm Amy, and it's totally different, but it's just the two of us. We're kind of self-contained. We literally could take that and perform it anyplace, because it's just the two of us. It's got some funny stuff. It also has some real poignant stuff. That's the way the guy writes, because even in *Same Time Next Year*, the son of the Alan Alda character gets killed in an automobile accident and they deal with that.

We're doing a third play by the same playwright in a few weeks. I'm not in it but, it's really hysterically funny stuff, with some interesting aha's. The play they just finished was called *Run For Your Wife*. I have never laughed so hard. The whole audience was just howling. When we were done, they were exhausted. We had these four chairs here, and this was Mary's house. We had these four chairs here, and this was Barbara's house. The middle chair was the husband of both of them. This one is on one side of London, and this one is on the other. Ron gets to play the most hysterically funny Stanley. He is trying to help his buddy keep these two wives and these two lives separate, and you just laugh almost on every line all the way through the play. It is just a riot.

So it's just a lot of fun to do. It's fun to wear a different character. I certainly enjoyed being Amy in *Special Occasions*. There have been so many others that I've been cast in that I have just loved— just wonderful. You can be just about anything. We have done a number of plays like *Steel Magnolias*. I wasn't in that one, but I played an eighty-some-odd-year-old woman in one of them, and I had to make my voice sound really old [demonstrates]. The way to do it when you don't have that elderly voice is you do it with a diaphragm. I came out of that saying, "Oh, my god. I'm exhausted." It's just a lot of fun, as is Sheep Dip. There is

no reason to do all this stuff if you don't have fun. With Sheep Dip we get involved in the creative part by writing everything, and it is just a kick.

How long have you been involved in Ageless Repertory?

Ron started the year before I did, but I would say it's been a good three years, maybe three and a half.

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Robert Smith: I was born in a little town in Michigan called Vicksburg, twelve miles south of Kalamazoo, in 1929. We didn't live there at the time. My grandfather had a farm there. My mother wanted to be close to the farm, although that wasn't her parent; it was Dad's parent.

I grew up all over the place. My folks were living in New York at the time. We were there for a while in two different places. We moved to Evanston, Illinois, when I was four. That's the first memory I have. We moved back to New York, then to Cincinnati, and in 1937, we moved to Highland Park, Illinois. I was in third grade, and that's where I grew up and went through high school and college. I was in Highland Park High School.

I went to college at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, for two years. I transferred out to the University of Washington because they had a drama

department and Carleton didn't, and I got my B.A. out there in speech, actually.

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

As you can tell from the dates, I grew up as a child during the Depression, but I didn't know it was going on because my father had a good job all the way through the depression. In 1937, he worked at the treasury department at Kroger in Cincinnati, which is a large grocery company. Then, in 1937, he became vice president of personnel at Marshall Field's in Chicago. From there he became a management consultant with A.T. Kearney & Company. He was with them until sometime in the 1940s. He quit there—sort of semi early retired—went back to MIT and taught a seminar in the graduate school. He had a master's in business administration from Northwestern.

After one year, Whirlpool was looking for a treasurer, and one of my dad's clients had been

Sears, Roebuck when he was a management consultant. So Sears told Whirlpool to go talk to my father, and he ended up as financial vice president of Whirlpool for ten years. He retired to Palo Alto [California], had a seminar in the graduate school out there, and died of colon cancer at sixty-three. He had a wonderful life. I feel sorry for the rest of us, but not for him. He had a great life.

My mother never worked. She was a housewife the whole time. We always used to say that Mother spent forty-one years backing away in the direction she wanted to go. [laughs] She was very active. She was on the school board when I was in high school. She was president of women's club, president of garden club.

Do you remember any art or music programs in the schools that you were going to prior to college?

Not really, no. I was not interested in the arts when I was a kid, except theater. My folks started taking me to plays when I was thirteen or fourteen, and I've been going to them ever since. I've kept track; I've been to over six hundred plays.

As far as painting or drawing, I was never interested in it. I could barely draw a stick figure, but I've always loved art. Throughout our married life, we have always belonged to the art museum wherever we lived and supported them as well as we could.

What do you imagine was the impetus for your parents to start taking you to plays when you were thirteen or fourteen?

My father was a frustrated actor. He was a finance man. I've heard him speak only two or three times in my life, but he was a marvelous public speaker. He loved being "on." When

there was a party, he was the center of attention...just automatically, almost.

It's interesting, since we'll be talking sometime about Ageless Rep[ertory]. My folks had a Reading Theatre group among their friends when I was growing up, and I remember him playing John Barrymore in a play. I'm going to be playing John Barrymore's ghost in a play shortly. [laughs] When he was at Northwestern, he saw all fifty plays that opened that year in Chicago, from the top of the house. They were 50 cents each. He said he knew every actor in America by the part in his hair.

My mother was artistic. She painted. She played the piano. She composed—just whatever struck her fancy. She was always very interested in that.

When did you come to Reno and what brought you here.

We came in 1980. We bought this house in February of that year. I quit working in L.A. in June, and we moved up here in July. The people who were in the house stayed and took care of it because their daughter was finishing high school. We came because of taxes. I had a payout from my company, and it saved me quite a lot of money coming to Nevada. We first looked in Carson City. We were looking for something like a duplex or a quadraplex—we would live in one and manage the other three—but couldn't find anything. Finally we were about ready to go home back to L.A., and we called one more real estate agent and talked to her for a while. She understood that that wasn't really what we wanted, and showed us two places. We made an offer on the second place she showed us. That's this place. So we moved in in August of 1980 and have been here ever since in the same place.

What sort of work were you in while you were in L.A.?

I was a salesman all my life, and the last thirteen years I sold stocks. I was a stockbroker for Jefferies & Company. Before that, though, I had sold appliances, TV, records, and time. At one time I was a radio and TV announcer. Right out of college, I was acting. I've always been on stage one way or another. [laughs] I've always said I never really did figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. The only advice my dad ever gave me was, "Whatever you do," he said, "learn how to sell, because you'll always be able to make a living. If people don't like the product you're selling, you can go sell something else." He was right.

Culturally, what kinds of things were you involved in before you came to Reno?

We belonged to the L.A. County Art Museum. We spent time there. We spent time at the Huntington Hartford [Gallery of Modern Art] and at the Norton Simon [Museum] out in Pasadena. We went to virtually every play that opened in L.A. We supported the symphony. Our last four years, we lived right in downtown L.A. in Bunker Hill Towers. It was right across from the music center, so there were three theaters within walking distance, and that was our recreation. I didn't start to get involved in the acting that I'm in now until I moved here.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first came up here?

I had a three-year payout, so we came up expecting to stay three years and go back. We still had a house in Huntington Beach that we'd been renting out for some time. We

bought a condominium in Pacifica and sold it without ever moving into it because we fell in love with Reno—the people, the area. It was so beautiful; there was so much to do. We got involved right away with the art museum, and even though it was a tiny little thing in the Hawkins House. We were sold on the town right away. We couldn't go back.

Were you surprised, culturally, with what you found in Reno at the time? Did you expect more or less to be around?

I'm not sure I had any particular expectations. I've always gone with the flow, but we were delighted with what we found. We liked the museum. We liked the symphony that they had, and we thought it was pretty neat that here was this little town—"little town"—of about 100,000 people at that time. By our standards, that was little. We had always lived in or near big cities. We were delighted that they had this here. Then, of course, it just grew and grew and grew. Frankly, I'm amazed at Reno and at what we have here. We're way ahead of most towns three times our size. It's delightful.

How did you find out about the museum?

I probably went looking for it. I do have one memory. They held a fundraising wine tasting at the Hawkins House, and we went to that. That was very early on. I'm something of a wine connoisseur, and we probably were drawn by that as much as anything. I know we would have become members right away anyway. That was a lovely little museum. That house was a nice location and they had beautiful displays. They did a gorgeous job with it. We really enjoyed it.

Where was the Hawkins House?

It's still there. It's on Court Street overlooking the [Truckee] river.

What was the general condition of the Hawkins House then?

It was in great shape. You know the Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation here in town. Prince [A.] Hawkins is Robert's younger brother and runs the foundation. The Hawkins House is where Prince grew up. They gave it to the museum at one point. They were the main supporters. It was a lovely place. They kept it in very good shape.

When they moved over to their new building on Liberty Street, we were supporters there and we were over there. That's when I got seriously involved with the museum. It was the late 1980s that the museum was moved over there—sometime between 1986 and 1987.

We left and went on the road in a motor home in 1989. We kept the house, but we were gone until 1993. When we came back, they were in full swing in the new place. It was at that time that I became seriously involved with the museum. We were at an art history program they were putting on, and they had just received a computer for their library. My wife nudged me and she said, "You could do that." [laughs] That's all it took for fifteen-years as the librarian there.

The library was started by a gentleman named John Morrison, who was a professor emeritus from UNR. He had started it eight or nine years before that. The museum had boxes and boxes of books, and he started cataloging them. They didn't have a computer, so he was back and forth to the university library all the time. John died, and they were good friends of ours—John and his wife, Etta. She was also a very heavy supporter of the museum. They lived right across the street from us. They

got us interested in the museum as much as anybody. Because John wasn't doing it anymore, they were looking for someone to work in the library. That's when Terry nudged me in the ribs, and there I was.

Can you describe the Liberty Street location, the one that opened in the late 1980s?

It's right off Sierra Street on Liberty. It is just a block west of Virginia. It had 15,000 square feet of display space, if memory serves me right. As you came in the front steps, it opened up into the display area, which is a pretty good size. It had school rooms. The museum has always been very strong at teaching. The library was a tiny little room, not much bigger than this, but it was rectangular. As a matter of fact, it wasn't as big as this. It was one story, if I remember right. The offices were to the rear. I seem to remember it was sort of like red brick.

Had the building been there before?

No. They built that library specifically. It was right when I came back that Steven High took over. He had just taken over while we were gone. It grew from there.

We had some fantastic exhibits in there. We had the Chihuly glass collection, and we had an enormous show of Rodin sculpture. Before that, we'd had a Dubuffey. It was a very active museum, and they had some great shows. My daughter arranged our fiftieth wedding anniversary party when the Chihuly exhibit was there, in the exhibit hall. [laughter] At that time, I'd been working there for quite a while.

The location now—the newer building that opened—is that on the same site that the old building was on?

Yes. They had owned a couple of buildings behind the old museum, and they took those down and used that space to build this. The whole thing was pretty much Steven's doing. I still remember when they broke ground. They had what they called a Backhoe Ballet. They had four backhoes and one great big earthmover, and these four guys did a dance, really, with their machines, with Steven directing them. We were covered by CNN. We were all over the country with this Backhoe Ballet. I've still got the t-shirts, as a matter of fact. [laughs]

Will Bruder, the architect that built it, wasn't going to do this because it was a small town. He was a pretty famous architect. He'd done the library in Phoenix and a lot of things like that. He and his wife were here during Artown, and his wife was very impressed with what the city was doing. She went to him and said, "You have got to do this museum. This town deserves you." So he did.

We had heard this story and didn't know if it was true or not. My wife caught the architect's wife at a cocktail party one night and asked her if this was true. She said, "Oh, yes. He was all set to go home, and I said, 'No, you can't do that. You've got to do this one.'"

Wow. Good for her for talking her husband into it.

Good for us for having Artown. [laughs]

What do you think of the new building and how does it compare to the previous iterations of the museum?

We are like a major city museum. I love the building. I think it's gorgeous. It's so different from everything else in town. It's beautifully designed. Inside the design is miraculous. They can do things in there you can't believe.

They can move around, and the spaces are very well done. I love the place. It is ten times anything they had before. We're really on the map with this, and we deserve to be.

When you started volunteering as the librarian in the older red brick building, what were some of the main tasks or problems you had to overcome?

A great many of the books were still simply in boxes, and they needed to be catalogued. My biggest challenge was learning how to catalogue. I am not a librarian. I had never done it before, and so I started studying the Library of Congress cataloguing system, which is what we use. I was going back and forth to the UNR library. There were people there who were very helpful to me, sort of teaching me what to do. The idea was to get the library in shape, so it could be used as a reference library and you could get to the books.

We very quickly started to outgrow that room which was called The Abernathy Library. The Abernathys were great supporters of the museum. We were overflowing almost right from the start. We would buy books and we got a lot of books donated to us. We had maybe 2,000 books when I took over that needed cataloguing. John had gotten about 500 of them done. I just went to work and it was almost like a regular job. I was in there sometimes every day working on it. Books kept coming in and coming in.

By the time we moved into the new museum, we were up to maybe 4,500 books, about half of which had been donated. Our goal at that time was 10,000. They are not going to go to 10,000; they've changed the direction of the library a little bit since I left.

It was just like a job. I kind of enjoyed it. My wife accuses me of being a hamster.

That comes from when I had a roommate in college who had a pet hamster, and we didn't know it at the time, but hamsters like to sort things. We learned this because, if there was a pile of a bunch of stuff on the kitchen table, the hamster would go around and sort it. He'd move this off to this side and this off to the other. We had a lot of fun watching him. Ever since then, anybody we know who likes to sort things is a hamster, and I am a hamster. I like things where they belong, and sorting the books was right up my alley. [laughs]

Can you describe what the collection was like?

Anything under the sun that had to do with art—architecture, painting, any type of visual art. It did include some DVDs—although at that time they were VHSs—but mainly books. It's interesting; the donations would come in, and as you might imagine, people tend to buy the same things. We get an awful lot of these very large coffee-table art books, and pretty soon we have four or five complete Monets...that sort of thing. So we had to adopt an attitude. We would tell people who donated that if they were books that we already had or for some reason couldn't use, we would sell them. We would also ask if that was all right with them, because we didn't want people being real upset because they donated a book and then we sold it. Almost everybody said that was fine.

The ones that were donated were generally collections of art either by one artist or by a school of artists. The books we bought would be a little more esoteric. They would go into history and the "how to" books. One gentleman gave us a whole bunch of books on watercolor, a beautiful collection that I believe they now have in the school. That was the sort of thing we got.

We have some extremely valuable books that have been given to us. I'm talking about

\$500 to \$1000 and more. Some people simply gave them to the museum and they were well aware of what they were worth. People have been most generous. We really had quite a lovely collection. We still do.

In terms of books that you were purchasing, how did you find them? How did you have a sense of the books that were out there?

I didn't buy the books. The curator's department in the museum was in charge of the library, so it was pretty much up to her and the staff there as to what they wanted to buy. I simply took books in and catalogued them. My role was to advise. For instance, if we were getting an overflow of a certain type of book and they were wanting to buy something in that line, I'd say, "You really don't need that. You've already got it." Even though the entire collection was on the computer, people didn't always check and see. Sometimes we ended up buying books we already had. They would generally check, though. Despite how many were there, I pretty well knew what we had. You get that way when you're working at things like that.

Did you do any work with the public at all, helping them find books in the collection? How was the library used?

The library started to become useable by the public when we moved into the new building. It was open for a certain time period. It still is. When we first started, it was only open a couple of days each week during the middle of the day. It's still open during the middle of the day from eleven to two every day the museum is open. There's someone on the desk, and for a long time it was me. Then I realized pretty quickly I couldn't be there every day, so we had a group of volunteers who came and would man the desk.

Also, I was still cataloguing. Cataloguing is a very time-consuming business. It takes quite a while to get one book totally catalogued, because you not only are deciding what catalogue number to use, you're making a little sticker for the spine and you've got to cover it. It takes a long time. Lots of times someone else would be manning the desk, as far as the public was concerned. I would be there typing away, but either I or the other people there would always help the public find a book or direct them in the direction they wanted to go. If they were interested in architecture, we had an architecture section. If they were interested in sculpture, there was a sculpture section. There was also a separate section for photography. That's how the system works—depending on the number, that's where they are.

Do you have a general sense of the sort of people that knew about the library and used it as a resource?

It's still a work in progress. We did have students come down, because we had, and still probably have, a more complete art library than even the university, so it's helpful to art students.

It's interesting, people would wander in, wondering what the room was, and look around. I'd send them back in the stacks, and sometimes they'd be back there half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, or an hour. Other times, they would just go back, run through, say, "Oh, that's nice," and walk out. It was just the general public more than anything else. To this day it doesn't get a lot of traffic. I have no idea why. The traffic it does get is truly interested in it these days, though.

The room that you were working out of at the red brick building on Liberty was described as a smallish room that you outgrew. Did you have

to make any changes to that room to make it functional as a library?

When we were in the old building, the library was not open to the public. We did have a by-appointment arrangement. Whole classes of high school art students would come in. Other students would come in, but only by appointment. It wasn't generally open to the public. It wasn't a very handy room for them to get to, for one thing. It was kind of hidden in the back corner.

This probably won't get into the record, but when you've got high school kids in there, there are books of nude paintings, and several of them got stolen by high school boys. [laughter] I can imagine that, you know. I'm a boy. I remember what it was like to be fifteen. [laughs]

With the move to the current location, are you able to have general hours?

Yes. We're open to the public, and it's a lovely space. They're changing it now, but I haven't been involved with it for a couple of years. I did this for fifteen years and they threw me a retirement party, and away I went. I still go in from time to time. I've become friends with, Bill Fox, the man who's sort of in charge of it now. We get together for lunch. Occasionally they'll run up against a book they can't figure out how to catalogue, and I still can. [laughs]

What is the actual space like in the new building and how does it compare in size and usability?

It's probably four times as large. You walk in and there is a desk that greets you, then there are racks of bookshelves that go back to the rear of the room. At the rear there's a table with chairs where they hold meetings.

They have a few desks along the side with hookups for people who want to bring their own computer in.

I believe most of this is being changed, however. They are going to put a couple of offices in; the spot at the back is going to become an office. It's changing substantially since I left. The museum is "The Center for Art + Environment," which is a national group, and we are the national center for it. That's their focus now, which is quite different than what I was doing.

Sooner or later, they're going to change their cataloguing system and move to one that can be used over the Internet. Steven worked up the one we're using now out of one of the ordinary programs that Microsoft had, and it's not useable outside of the museum.

What did you have to do to move the collection from the older red brick building on Liberty Street to the new location, and was there an intermediary place where you were located?

They put the collection in storage. We packed the whole thing up and tried to keep it in order by catalogue number. I have no idea how many boxes there were; it was a ton. When they brought them back in, I had a whole crew of people who came and volunteered—several people from the downtown library, the Washoe County Library System, and some of our people—and I directed how to put them on the shelves. When they were all in there, we had to really go to work to put them in order, but they did a pretty good job of getting them in. That was how it worked. We had them all boxed, and each box was numbered with what was in it, so it was easy to take them back out again. It was a monstrous job, though; it was an all-day job just unpacking the boxes and getting them put on the shelves.

Do you have a sense of what it took for the museum in general to upgrade the buildings and move its permanent collection and what happened with that in the interim?

I'm not sure where it was all stored. I think Stremmel Gallery has been a big help. I don't know where they kept the artwork. It requires a particular type of storage; it has to be stored at a certain temperature and with a certain amount of moisture in the air. It was quite a job.

For getting the museum built, we had applied for a grant from the Reynolds Foundation, and got the grant. It was, I believe, 10.2 million dollars. It was the largest grant that they had ever made to an artistic institution of any kind. We had to match it, and locally we matched it. That building has no mortgage; it's paid for. That's one of the things that amazes me about this town. We've got a symphony orchestra in the black; we've got a chamber orchestra in the black; we've got a museum that's in no debt. It's just amazing.

The people that moved in have really made the town. We sit there and decry the traffic getting bigger, but the fact that these people came from California, brought their money with them, and aren't afraid to spend it on the arts is a wonderful thing for the town. That's really why we are able to have what we have. So I'm not bothered by the traffic at all. [laughter] Of course, when you've lived in L.A., nobody has traffic.

Reno doesn't know what traffic is.

That's right. What was it Cory Farley said? He drove through the Spaghetti Bowl four times before he realized it was there. [laughter]

How has each progressive move—from the Hawkins House, to the red brick building on Liberty, to the new building—affected the museum in general?

I think it's developed into a world-class museum. Each move engendered a bigger public response. You were able to do more important and larger shows each time. It seems to me, with each thing that happens, it just gets bigger and bigger. It has been a tremendous improvement. It's a tremendous thing for the town... the city. The moves were all designed to create a greater museum, and in each case they did.

I know that the role that the library plays, as you said, is currently changing, but while you were volunteering there, what was the relationship of the library to the museum, and why did the museum have a collection and a library or choose to make that available to people?

The original reason to have a library is for the staff and their research. They use that when they're putting their programs together and deciding what to display, what programs they'll have, what shows to buy, and so forth. That's the primary purpose of the library. In my travels I went into large libraries in cities we visited—I'm talking about art museum libraries—and question them on how it is used.

The Seattle Library, for instance, is like a bank vault. You have to have a major key and all kinds of permission to get in. Most of them are like that. I haven't found that most of them are designed for the public. I think we're in the forefront of opening it up to the public and letting them use it, which I think is a good thing. It's delightful. When I was there, I always enjoyed talking to people that came

in—why they were there, why they stopped in. It's a good addition, but it's somewhat different than other places I've been. The interaction with the public is much greater with the library, but as I say, it is still a research library. That's its number-one purpose and always has been.

Besides the library being open to the public, is there anything else that makes the library at the museum unique from other places?

It does have the focus now of the "Art + Environment." The museum has a couple of focuses. One of them is a photographic exhibit. It's called "Altered Landscape," what man has done to the landscape. We rent out shows or collections to other museums who want to see them. When my wife and I were visiting New Zealand, it turned out that the little museum in New Zealand had our show down there, which was so weird. We went in and introduced ourselves and got invited to a party that night. [laughs]

That's the only thing that's unique, though, is its focus. Most libraries have a focus of some sort, and that's ours. We're not unique, because that means one of a kind, but we are among a small number of libraries that are as open to the public as we are. You don't find that most places. People don't go to an art museum to use a library. I think that's one of the reasons they don't get a huge amount of traffic, because nobody is used to this. I've never been in the library at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, although I've been in that museum probably fifty times. The same thing goes for the de Young [Museum] in San Francisco. I don't even know if they've got a library. We are unique that way.

Is there any reason why it is open to the public?

I'm not sure what engendered it. I'm pretty sure Steven was the driving force of opening it to the public. When I first started, it wasn't open to the public, and his dream for the new museum had always included having a library that was open to the public. That's probably the driving force behind it.

Can you tell me a little bit about the people that you interacted with while you were volunteering there? You mentioned Steven High. Are there other staff members, board members, or others involved with the library that you worked with?

There's only one person left that was with the library when I joined it, and that's Amy Oppio. I've been through four or five curators and three directors. So my interaction has basically always been with the director of the museum, the curator, and whoever was running the volunteer group. Those are the three that are most connected to what I was doing. I know everybody there. Well, I did; I don't now. Those were the people that helped me the most. My artistic knowledge is not vast, and I would get books in and really not have a clue as to how they should be catalogued or what sort of work it was, so I would talk to people like the curator, who did know this. I've had quite an education in fifteen years there. You can't help but learn a little.

In terms of working in the library, is there an artist, a type of art, or anything else that you discovered that has stood out for you?

Well, I have favorite artists, but they're very much like everybody else's. Van Gogh is my favorite.

Since working there, I've been more diligent about going and seeing other collections. In Las Vegas, Steve Wynn had his

collection being shown at the Bellagio that he owned at the time. Steve had a broadcast that you held to your ear and told you about the paintings. He had a Jackson Pollock. I had never understood Jackson Pollock, and Steve explained him in this. I finally understood what drove him to paint the way he did, and it changed my perspective on what I was looking at, which I really appreciated; I enjoyed that. I now can look at a Pollock and I see things in it. I see what was going on in his mind, which is a pretty interesting mind, if you know anything about Jackson Pollock. I have favorites, yes, but I have fairly eclectic tastes when it comes to art. I don't dislike a lot of things. I like things that I've never seen before. I like new things, which helped in working there.

Bob, you mentioned Steven High as one of the directors that you worked with. Can you tell me about the different directors you've worked with?

I didn't really know the fellow before Steven, so Steven and our current director, David Walker, are the only ones I've worked with. David has taken the museum in another direction, "Art + Environment." He's a very young fellow; he has got to be in his forties. Of course, you get to a point where anybody under seventy looks the same. [laughter] Don't trust anybody under sixty.

Those are the only two I've worked with, and they're fairly different. David is much more hands-on and he's a charismatic speaker. Steven was more businesslike, but he had the dream of the big museum. David has the dream of the important museum. They both did, but I think that's David's focus, and he's doing it. I mean, he had them in the black this last year, 2010, which these are tough times to keep an organization like that in the black, and he's done it and I really admire him for it. He's brought some very controversial shows

to the museum. Some either love him or hate him, you know. I don't see anything wrong with that. I think that's the way it ought to be.

You mentioned that there are different curators you had worked with. Who are some of them, if you can remember?

I worked with Diane Deming. I don't remember who the curator was in the old museum, to tell you the truth; I really don't. I was so focused on getting the thing put together. It was just really day-to-day working on the books, so I didn't really get involved much in the museum operations at all at that time.

I worked with Diane for a while and then she was replaced by Ann Wolfe. Ann is extremely knowledgeable and a lot of fun to talk to. She was a big help with information. They both were, but those are the two I worked with. I think Ann is probably several cuts above. I hope she doesn't, but she could go to work for a big city very easily.

As someone who's been really involved in the museum but also attended it, what have been some good exhibits, some important exhibits, some of your favorite exhibits?

Chihuly was probably my favorite exhibit, to be honest about it. They've also done some local things. Roy Powers is an extremely popular local artist and friend of mine, not a good friend, but more than just an acquaintance. I enjoyed his show a great deal.

Who's the artist [Fernando Botero] that—oh, gosh. All of his people are very large and fat and have very tiny faces. He's extremely popular and very successful, and I couldn't stand his stuff. [laughter]

I love these things when I'm going through them, but the ones that stick out in my mind are the ones back in the old museum, I guess

because I was more involved in and closer to the actual shows themselves. In the new museum, I go to all of the shows and I like them, but they don't stick in my mind. That's no fault of the shows; that's a fault of aging.

What changed between the time you were working at the older museum to the new museum, that's caused you to become less involved in the exhibits?

Well, when I got to the new museum, I pretty well got a handle on all the books. There was no backlog; everything that we had in storage was now on the shelves. I wasn't spending near as much time there. In the old museum, I was in every day and for a long time. With the new museum, I would come in once or twice a week. I think that's the main difference. I am now more of simply a patron who goes than someone who's involved. It just got more and more so that way as I got toward the end of my tenure there. I reached the point where I could get everything done once a week. Books weren't coming in that fast. The biggest thing I did before I left was when they had their first book sale, I priced all the books that they put in the sale. It took up a lot of time, but it was a very successful sale. I think that's the main difference between the two. As I say, I still go. I see everything they do there.

The one thing they've done that sticks in my mind the most was the Raphael painting of the girl. That's the only other time in my life I've spent so much time just standing and looking at one painting. I did that in L.A. with a Van Gogh picture of a wheat field. I stood there for half an hour. My wife had been through. She came back and said, "You're still here?" I couldn't leave it. I was swept up into the painting. The same thing happened with the Raphael. It's just an incredibly beautiful painting, and it has stuck with me. We were

incredibly lucky to get that. There are major museums around the country that have not had that, and we have. It was just absolutely magnificent. That's number one in the new museum.

How does a museum go about getting a major national exhibit or a major exhibit that's touring around? Do you know how that process works?

Not exactly, but every museum is aware of what's available or what's traveling. There are huge lists of things that go around, and they have price tags. It's a pretty expensive proposition. You bring in a 20-million-dollar show, for instance, and you've got insurance, which is a huge cost. You've got to bring it. You've got to take care of it. You've got to pack it, unpack it, and pack it up. So you have to find sponsors for this. Fortunately, we've got a town full of art lovers with deep pockets, so we've been able to do that.

How they decide, though, I don't know. I haven't sat in on the process. I'm sure in David's case, he's constantly looking for something new and something different, something that hasn't been done before, and he's been pretty successful at it. He's brought in some really interesting things that we probably wouldn't have had under Steven, which is no reflection on either one of them. That's the way they are. But as to how they make their decisions, cost probably has a lot to do with it, but I don't know.

Do you have any sense of people, foundation, or private groups in Reno that have been big sponsors and have paid to bring in?

The E.L. Wiegand Foundation is very large, and they're right here in town. Also, there's the Hawkins Foundation. When you

go to the museum, they have a board there where you can see all the names of the large subscribers. [Charles N.] Chuck Mathewson and IGT have given a lot to the museum, and he's been quite remarkable. Chuck is also an acquaintance of mine. We were in the same brokerage firm back in L.A. I can't just reel off names, but they're all there in front of God and everybody to see. Wiegand, they're involved in all sorts of things. I'm sure you're aware of them at the university. A lot of the people that support the things at the university support the art museum as well.

You mentioned Altered Landscapes as being a part of the museum's permanent collection. Do you know other areas that the museum focuses in for its permanent collection?

No, not as areas. They have a permanent collection, but the focus now is twofold. "Art + Environment" is a focus, and the "Altered Landscapes" is a focus. Other than that, they have pieces that they've bought or been donated to them that are part of the collection, but those are the two that are actual expressed purposes of the museum.

When did the museum switch to the focus on Art + Environment?

When David came in. It was something he was particularly interested in doing. So, yes, that's when it happened.

What sort of things have they exhibited in relation to the focus on Art + Environment?

It's still a work in progress. The library collection is leaning that way, and they've received some extremely interesting very old works that go with that. Some day you might want to try and—well, this is OLLI, isn't it?

Okay. [laughs] I was going to say you might try and get an oral thing from Bill Fox, who runs it.

They have had some shows, but my impression is that it is still building. The whole department is growing and finding itself in exactly what direction it wants to go. Other than that, I haven't been involved in it, so I can't really help you there too much.

Do you have any sense of what the museum's relationship is to the local art community, is there any sort of interplay there between the two?

I think most of the artists in town are on speaking terms with the museum, because we have local artist shows. I can't help you much there, because I'm not involved in it. I do know that local artists are around that I've talked to who have brought books in—that sort of thing. I think it's a good relationship. It's a major museum. They don't show everybody, but they've had shows of many of the local people.

Do you remember some of the local people that have had managed to get exhibits?

The first one that jumps to mind is Roy Powers. A photography exhibit connected with a book that was published of Nevada legends, so to speak, by Reed Bingham. He's done two or three things there with the group. Families of people like Western artists that are no longer with us still bring things in. Their families are around. There are a lot of local artists who come to the museum and shown their works there, but I don't know the names off the top of my head.

Do you have a general sense of how the community of Reno embraces the museum?

It seems to me it has been embraced fairly well. One of the interesting things they did was open up to the Spanish-speaking part of town. A lot of the exhibits now will have both English and Spanish explanations of what they're looking at on the display, and this has brought in quite a lot of people.

We eat dinner at one of the buffets in town and have a favorite waiter who is from Guatemala. They have one free Saturday for the public each month, and he's in there almost every Saturday. He's got a big family and he can't afford to bring them all in. It's opening up that way, which I think has been very nice.

I think the public is accepting the museum extremely well. We've had some huge crowds for some of these things, and the word is out.

The reactions people have to the building itself are so interesting. I have two or three friends that think it's an absolute monstrosity. [laughs] Most of my friends are like I am, though; they think it's a remarkable building. That's what people are like. I think it's been accepted and, in general, the townspeople are fairly proud of it.

Do you know of any programs or classes that the museum offers to the public?

It has a regular school for youngsters that's going all the time. There are new classes going on, and each season they'll put together a whole series of events or classes for adults like "how to" classes or appreciation classes. They're extremely active. That's one of the reasons the Bruders were interested in the museum. Our work is one of the reasons we got the grant with schools and education. They do a tremendous job of this. I've never been involved in any of the classes, but I get the lists all the time and see what they're doing. It's quite remarkable.

Do you think that the museum is unique in how it reaches out to the public and to the schools?

I can't speak for other museums. I think most museums do something. Some do better than others, but I have no idea. Sacramento Museum doesn't do anything like that much, but most major museums have a lot of interaction with the public, I think, and we're right up there with them.

Besides classes, are there any other ways that the museum does outreach to the public?

Only by what it shows, I think. They talk to various groups in town to engage the activity, but I don't think any more so than any other museum would do. What you're showing and bringing in is the main thing. I think they're doing a pretty good job. Of course, when you get something major...the crowds for that Raphael painting were spectacular. The one for Botero, the fellow that has the big fat sculptures that I didn't care for, that drew in a lot of people. He's a very popular artist.

Their attendance is pretty good. Once a month, for instance, the third Sunday of the month, they have a jazz brunch. They bring in a little jazz combo and the Café Musée opens up. We go to every one of those. I think they have a no-host bar the first Thursday the museum is open at night. It's become quite a gathering place. They have the free Saturdays, the second Saturday of every month. They're doing quite a lot to bring people in.

The spaces are all available for rent, and sometimes are free for certain fundraisers. They're very open to that and do a lot of it. I think that gets the public involved.

You mentioned some controversial exhibits that David Walker brought in. Do you remember any in particular that people were up-in-arms about?

I don't think anybody's gotten outraged that much. They had a show of chairs that not too many thought all that highly of, at least with people that I talked to. I don't think there's been anything that's been a serious problem for folks. There are certain paintings that people don't like, but it's all a matter of taste.

The series of Audubon prints was quite popular. They bought that, by the way. That's now under permanent ownership of the museum. It's one of several. That's not a unique collection; those are prints, not originals.

No, nobody's threatened to burn the building down. [laughter]

What do you think have been some of the major developments and accomplishments of the museum in the time that you've been a patron and been a volunteer?

Well, the major accomplishment is building the museum we have. That's the biggest thing. It's become way more than just a local small-town museum; it's become a world-class museum. I think it's engaged the public a lot more than it ever had. With each move upward, it got bigger and bigger. I'm really proud to be in the town with that. It's been managed well. It has a very dedicated staff, by the way, and they do an extremely good job. I think it's just grown beautifully with the town. It's a showcase and an asset.

Were there any major accomplishments or changes with the museum's library over the time that you were—

Oh, yes. It got bigger and bigger. Well, the major change was it opened to the public. That was quite a remarkable thing for them to do. As I say, it's grown in size; it's grown in capacity; it's grown in what it is. You can find almost

anything concerning the art world you want somewhere in that library. Again, it's become as remarkable as the museum itself. I really sort of felt like I was growing with it. It was just sort of enveloping me as it got bigger and bigger.

You don't have any nightmares of being surrounded by books or anything like that?

No. [laughs] No, no, I don't. I'm a book lover. I have a fairly large library myself. I read one or two books a week. I must admit that most of it's escape literature, but anyway.

What have been some of the more memorable experiences that you've had during the time you've been a patron and a volunteer at the museum?

The move itself was the most memorable thing. When opening day came, that was more memorable than anything. Our fiftieth anniversary party at the Chihuly was fairly memorable for me. Except for the shows themselves, I don't relate to anything memorable besides what I've seen. It's such a great place to visit these days. I have lunch there from time to time. It's just wonderful to wander around in, but everything's memorable, really...marvelous shows. They're getting a great selection.

What sort of an impact, if any, do you think that the museum has had on Reno?

I think it's helped bring people in. When I was in the library, for instance, I had people come in from Sacramento, from Stockton, from San Francisco who heard about it. They came up to visit Reno, and that was one of the things they came to see. I think it's brought people in. I think it's made us a more important center. I hope that it's brought

some business in. I think at least people of my persuasion are very proud of the thing and the fact that it's there, and we talk about it. Whenever we travel, we talk about it; "Come see our museum." So I think it has had an impact on the town. It's made us more of a cosmopolitan city, 400,000 population or whatever we are now, but we're not a little burg anymore.

Is there anything about the museum's library that I haven't asked you about that is important to include?

I think you've been pretty thorough. I don't know how thorough I've been. It's still a work in progress. They've shaved it down a bit. They've moved things around. Education-type books they've moved into the museum school instead of having them all in the museum library. The sales have gotten rid of a lot of the duplicates that they had. I'll be interested to see what it develops into eventually, because, as I say, it's definitely still a work in progress. I'm waiting to see what they're going to do with it. It'll be interesting. The future will be as interesting as the past, if not more so.

I know that you've been involved in things beyond the museum. Could you tell me a little bit about your involvement with Ageless Repertory?

I didn't get into the group until 2007. I had seen one by accident. I was in the downtown library and happened to be on the bottom floor where they have a little theater. Something was going on, so I walked in. Anything having to do with theater, I walk in. That's one of my goals. I love theater. They were doing this reading play, which is sort of like—this is before your time— but it's sort of like going to a radio studio where they were

doing Lux Radio Theatre or that sort of thing, although they do more acting.

Anyway, I belong to this bridge group with Len Overholser, who is the executive director of the acting group. By that time I had seen several things they had done, and I said, "You know, Len, I have a background in radio and TV, and I've been on stage. I'm a pretty good reader. If you ever need somebody to fill in, I'd be happy to."

He said, "Why don't you come on out?"

I asked him if they'd ever done any poetry. I love to read poetry aloud also. He said, "No. We're doing a series of three one-acts, and you might come out and read some poems in between. Come on out and read for the cast, see what they think."

He wanted me to read, of all things, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, which everybody knows, of course. So I did, and they liked it. That's what I did the first time I appeared with them. I did a poem in between each one of the acts.

Then he came up with a part in a play and said, "I think you can do this one." It was a part of a British earl. It was fairly successful, and it's been Katy bar the door since. I'm a regular member of the cast now.

We have fifteen to twenty members in the group. About half of those are very active, and I'm one of those. I'm in my third play this spring and I've got two more to do coming up—one right after the other. We'll be doing eight or nine shows during Artown. I'm in a few of those. Having been on stage, I've reached the point now where I don't trust myself to learn lines and remember them, but it's great to do these things. You have the script with you, and our audience has accepted this very well. Watching these, they get to the point pretty quickly where they forget the fact that there's a script in front of them. It has been a lifesaver. I just absolutely love it. There's

no way I could do that and the library both, because I'm either rehearsing or in a play.

You mentioned that you actually have a show right after this interview for Ageless Rep. What show are you doing?

It's called *Return Engagements*, and there are, I think, three couples involved in it. Through the four acts, some of the people grow or disappear or come back, but they're all interconnected. I think there are four scenes and I'm in two of them. The other people are in two. One person is in three of the four. But it's not just a comedy; there are some touching moments in it. My scene is quite emotional. I have to do a fair amount of real acting, which is fun. I can cry on cue; I just have to think about certain things.

I think the one after it is one where I play a ghost of John Barrymore. In one after that, I'm paired with a lady. That's four one-act plays. We play an older couple on an airplane. It's just a little vignette. They're really fun.

The group itself is all volunteer. Everybody is in it because they like it. They love doing it. Everybody in it has stage or screen or TV experience or radio—some more than others—and some are still doing regular acting.

Had you been involved in the Philharmonic Guild?

Well, we were members of the Guild, is all. It supports the Philharmonic. It raises money for the Philharmonic, and that's what we're involved in. It's nothing more than really being a member and attending various functions and helping put them together.

How would you describe the quality of the Philharmonic and its place in the cultural landscape of Reno?

Oh, boy. We don't deserve the Philharmonic we've got. It is so good, and our conductor, our new director [Laura Jackson] is so good. There are always people who want to argue about the selections. I was in the record business early on. I worked five years for RCA Victor, and so I know classical music pretty well, but I love it when someone plays something I've never heard before; she's doing that. I'm hearing things that I haven't heard, and I think it's a marvelous organization. By the way, it's frequently sold out. It's very well accepted. When the previous director, Barry [Jekowsky], came in, they had to go to two performances of everything instead of one, and that's grown. I think, with this last group they had, they sold out both the Tuesday evening and the Sunday performance, which is kind of unheard of for Reno.

The Reno Chamber fills up Nightingale hall at the Church Fine Arts Building. They do two performances of everything also. Of course, a lot of the same musicians are in both of them. We have such a wealth of great musicians in this town; it's just unbelievable. We wouldn't miss it, wouldn't miss one. I think it has been a great thing for the city to have that sort of a philharmonic. Sacramento doesn't even have one. They went broke. This is absurd. So that's another thing I love about Reno. It's this cultural oasis in the desert, you know. It really is.

We talked a lot about the museum, and obviously the museum would be a physical space in which arts and culture are centered and focused, but are there other areas in Reno that focus on arts and culture or act as a venue for art, music, or performance?

We have gone to a few things that Sierra Arts [Foundation] does. They put together

some really interesting little shows. They've done some things in the Riverside Hotel.

I have not been to the Knitting Factory, that new theater that fronts Virginia Street between First and Second, that you enter from the alley. I haven't been there, although I understand they're doing a lot of Pop music stuff. We haven't been to this either, but I have had friends who are addicts of the live operas that are being shown in the Century Theater on Saturdays. I tried to make the last one, but something came up and I couldn't do it.

So, yes, I think there's a lot going on around this town, all over town. We rarely go to anything at night anymore, but there's a lot of stuff going on during the day. It's a great place to live.

In the thirty-one years that you've lived here, what broader changes have you seen culturally going on in Reno, not just in what's available, but also in Reno's relationship with the arts and culture?

The whole town has grown culturally. It's a totally different place than when we moved here, and it was great when we moved here. If you can't find something to do in this town, there's something wrong with you. I think it's just expanded so.

The Philharmonic has become so much greater. The museum has become so much greater. There is theater all over town. Ours is just a little readers' theater, but you've got the Reno Little Theatre, the Good Luck Macbeth, and the Bruka, and they're all putting on great shows. So, from a cultural standpoint, I don't miss Los Angeles.

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Ron Smith: My dad worked for the Bank of America and was at that time employed in Salinas, California. That was where I was born on the twenty-fifth of December 1935. We didn't live in that community very long. My dad was moved to San Raphael, California, just north of San Francisco. I believe we spent just a couple of years there and then moved to San Francisco. All of my schooling and growing-up occurred in San Francisco.

Do you remember what the schools were like?

Well, they certainly seemed adequate at the time. I went to Edward Robison Elementary School in the San Bruno District of San Francisco, which is near Bayview off of Silver Avenue, Bayshore Boulevard area of the city. Immediately down the street was Portola Junior High School. From there, I had a choice of going to either Mission High

or Balboa High. They were about equidistant from our home, and I chose Mission High School because both of my folks had attended and graduated from there.

At the completion of that, after looking at several college opportunities, the one that I could afford and the one that actually ended up providing an education in broadcasting (which was the direction I wanted to go), was San Francisco State College.

Growing up in San Francisco, do you remember culturally what was happening?

I was singing fairly early in my life. I used to do some solo work as a child, and played a musical instrument in junior high school. I played trumpet and continued to play trumpet. I did perform a little in college and did some performing in high school—both plays and operettas. We did a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta—I sang a lead in high school—called *The Gondoliers*. I performed in a couple of plays. One of them was Ferenc

Molnár's *Lilliam*, which ultimately was turned into *Carousel* as a musical production, but at that time we just did the play.

Culturally in the city, particularly when I was doing plays and singing, we had opportunities to go and see live performances, usually for free. That was certainly kind of fun. I do remember seeing *The Music Man* in San Francisco. It was quite a good professional production. My folks were not big into going to live performances, so most of our entertainment was probably motion pictures.

Do you remember any well-known venues in San Francisco at the time?

Well, the plays that I saw were at the Curran or the Geary Theater down on Geary Street. I think the Curran is now called something else. They were two legitimate theaters there. As an adult, we've gone back and seen various plays like *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, and so forth.

When did you become aware of having this voice that was suited for singing and voice work?

Well, I think the ability to read music, which I learned while I was learning how to play the trumpet... to be able to read a score and know where the notes should be was important. I sang in a chorus in college and found I could certainly hold my own. The tone of my voice was okay for singing baritone and bass.

During two summers that I worked in Yosemite between semesters of school, we had, as part of the employees' working up there, a group called the Valley Singers. These were employees of the various governmental agencies—Yosemite Park and Curry Company, Standard Oil, and all. Students like myself

were taking a summer break and working in Yosemite. We sang with a full orchestra, also comprised of students that were part of the employee group there. I think that was part and parcel.

As an adult, I've been singing in the church choir for the last thirty years and as well as the *Sheep Dip Show*.

Can you tell me about your experience in broadcasting and how that led you to Reno?

I got two degrees in college—a B.A. and an M.A. I got a master's in liberal arts with a broadcasting major. With that, I was still working a good thirty hours a week for the Postal Service. That's what got me through college. My first job out of college that was in the industry was a summer relief job at KGO in San Francisco, the ABC affiliate for both radio and TV. I worked first for a month as a radio producer and then for two months after that as an editor on the television side, learning how to edit film. Film was the predominant medium outside of live television. Videotape was just coming into the business at that time.

From there, I got a job through KGO with a man who owned a radio station in Bakersfield, California. The theory was let's go to a small market, learn as much as we can and do as much as we can to ultimately return to a major market like San Francisco or Los Angeles.

I took the job in Bakersfield in radio and that ended up being a total disaster. The company was not making any money. In a market of five radio stations, its ratings were about fifteenth, because stations from Los Angeles and Fresno and so forth were in the market. It was not a good situation.

After being hired in September of 1959, by December I was laid off, and that's with a wife

and a small child living in a rented home in Bakersfield. That led us into 1960 and looking for work in California wherever I could in broadcasting. There was a small recession going on, so there weren't a lot of jobs open. I had an opportunity for a promotional job at the CBS outlet in Sacramento. They had gotten my résumé, said, "Come on up. Let's do some interviews."

I did the interview, and came in second. I had my wife and baby with me, and it was midday. So, I said, "You know, I know there's a TV station in Reno. Let's just take a flyer and drive over the hill." We did, and found the TV station in the late afternoon. I found that there was a job opening if I could come back the next morning to interview for the job. Certainly we could.

We got a motel, stayed over, and I came in the next morning and interviewed for the job. The one station in town at the time was KOLO, Channel 8. Don Reynolds owned the station at the time. I interviewed with the station manager, Lee Hirschland, and the program director, Jere Laird. They said, "Well, part of the job will be on air." Again, this was before tape had been introduced to the market. They were doing a noon newscast, so they asked me to prepare a fifteen-minute newscast with the materials I had at hand, which was the Associated Press and UPI wire service.

I prepared a newscast and did it live on the air while they sat in another room and watched it on television. After we were done, they ended up hiring me. So that's how I came to Reno. That occurred in April of 1960. We moved physically into the area on Memorial Day weekend of 1960. I've lived in Reno ever since.

Back in Bakersfield, because there weren't any jobs, I took a job with the Census Bureau. Fortunately in 1960 we had a census. The

position was called technical officer, which was second-in-command of three counties. I was the training officer for those supervisors who would oversee the actual census takers.

I had my first commercial airplane ride to go to Denver to learn how to do it. I came back and trained the people that we had hired as supervisors. When the census started on April first, I was out in the field working with the supervisor and the census bureau people in the three counties—King, Kern, and Tulare Counties of California—to make sure that we had a good, complete census.

We ended up being, after a quality control check, one of the best in the country. My boss, who wanted to be in government service, was offered another position immediately to finish up some census in other markets that were not doing well. He went on to a career in government work after that. They offered me a similar position because we had done so well. I said, "No, this is not the field I want to spend the rest of my life in." So we did have an interim of some financial income while I was looking for work.

What were your impressions of Reno when you moved up here?

I was familiar with the town. I had traveled here with my folks on vacations a couple of times. In my first marriage, our honeymoon included a several-night stay in Reno, staying at the Riverside Hotel (which is now the Artists Lofts), having dinner at the Mapes Hotel and playing the games at Harolds Club. These were the old clubs that were in place at that time, so I was familiar with Reno.

What I found when I arrived was I didn't realize how small it was. It was really very small. Again, there was one television station that carried all three networks at that time—ABC, NBC, and CBS. There were four

radio stations in town at that time—KOLO, which was affiliated with KOLO-TV at that time, KOH, KBET, and KONE. There were four AM radio stations. FM had not come here. It came in within the next year. KNEV was the first FM radio station to go on the air, I believe in 1961, with Jerry Cobb as the owner.

What we found was a very small, downtown-oriented community. All of the department stores, like Sears, Montgomery Ward, and Gray Reeds, were situated right in the middle of downtown a block or so away from where the casinos were located. There was Harolds Club, Harrah's, Club Cal Neva (which came in later), and the two hotels. Mostly it was a motel town. There were really only three hotels in town actually for tourists, including the El Cortez Hotel, which is where KOLO Radio was situated.

After I arrived, I discovered that the program director of the radio station was somebody I went to college with. He ended up hiring me to work weekends so that we could actually make a living. I came to town to work for \$350 a month, which was, even at that time, not a lot of money. Amazingly, within about a year and two months, we were able to buy a house. It's amazing what you could do at that time.

So again, the first impression Reno is very small. Having been raised in a big city like San Francisco, the contrast was striking. Fifty thousand people lived here at that time. Sparks was a very small community of maybe seven or eight thousand. There were no freeways. You drove everything on surface-level streets. We felt comfortable right away because it was a town that I think still has some of the charm of if you meet somebody, you're likely to see them again in a week or so and they will remember you. That is still kind of true.

Was there anything happening culturally and were you looking for cultural activities when you first came here?

No, not really. I was just trying to make a living. We enjoyed occasionally going to the casinos to see the lounge acts that were free. Occasionally, if we had a chance to get out, that would be something that we would do. The major showrooms didn't occur until.... John Ascuaga's Nugget built a showroom in 1961. By that time, of all things, I was working for John Ascuaga's Nugget because I lost my job at KOLO. They had about three purges and I survived those, but didn't survive the fourth. It was one of those interesting times in the business.

Do you remember what kind of acts the casinos were bringing in at the time?

I can remember the Riverside Hotel had one of the first topless shows. That was very fresh and new in 1960, if you will. We did have to catch that and it was a fairly well-done show. It was a Folies Bergère-type show. It had French performers and they were, indeed, topless. For its time, that was a little titillating. We were pretty young guys at that time. The other acts were Louis Prima, Keely Smith, and Sam Butera and the Witnesses in the lounge shows at Harrah's.

We were not aware of any legitimate theater because there really wasn't. The Reno Little Theater was operating at that time, but I can't recall that we ever went to any of their performances.

Were the casino shows maybe the only game in town at the time?

Pretty much. There wasn't a lot else going on. Occasionally, there would be concerts. I

remember Harolds Club at different times would bring in an opera singer as a special performance. They would use the Manogue High School Auditorium for the performance because there weren't any venues really available of any size to hold things like that.

The Pioneer Center wasn't built yet, but the old State Building was in place. The State Building had an auditorium of a size that probably held four to five hundred people, with folding chairs on a flat floor with a raised stage. There were performances brought to town occasionally for things like that. Several years later, I sang there as a barbershopper. We performed there before the Pioneer Center was built.

Can you tell me about your time working for the Reno Chamber of Commerce?

The Chamber of Commerce was the promotional arm for the city at that time. In addition, it was still involved with general business development and working with retailers—standard Chamber of Commerce activities. It was involved a little bit in politics, but generally it took care of the business community.

I became involved when the Chamber had the Convention & Visitors' Bureau as part of its staffing. I was hired in 1967 to learn the job of running a Convention Bureau. One person was doing that specifically—Will Jergens. The job was to solicit conventions to come to town to use the Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors' Authority convention center, which was at that time called the Centennial Coliseum. It was designed to be a sports arena and a convention center, and our job was to try and solicit conventions to use that facility with breakout rooms and its main arena.

The Convention & Visitor Authority evolved out of what was called the Fair and

Recreation Board. The Fair and Recreation Board was a separate political entity under the county and the cities. The membership was made up of elected officials from the city of Sparks, city of Reno, and Washoe County. They sat on the board as a body to oversee the construction of the Centennial Coliseum, the downtown facility, which was the Pioneer Center, and to collect room taxes.

The room tax law, I believe, occurred in 1959. This body was designed to oversee the collection of those funds from tourism, motels, and hotels, and to build the facilities. They contracted with the Chamber of Commerce, providing money to the Convention Bureau to solicit conventions to come to town, to run the Visitors' Bureau (which was a phone bank with an 800-number available to travel agents primarily), and to book business into Reno, Sparks, and North Lake Tahoe. Washoe County and Incline Village had some small properties at that time.

My job was to oversee the Visitors' Bureau, which involved the phone banks with the first Wide-Area Telephone Service—WATS lines—800-numbers. We were one of the first in the country to have them available to travel agents that in markets we promoted to, particularly the Northwest—Portland, Seattle-Tacoma, Vancouver, B.C., and Northern California.

In addition to that, we had a news bureau which was charged with publicizing this area in various media throughout the country. We had one person in charge of that and each had a secretarial or administrative backup. So my job was to oversee those functions of the Convention, Visitors', and News Bureau, contracted through, at that time, the Fair and Recreation Board to provide those services. I worked there ten years.

What sort of things were you promoting at that time?

We always were promoting the nighttime activities of our casinos and the entertainment involved with the casinos. The daytime activities included the Truckee River and Lake Tahoe. We always tied in the magical name—and it was—of Lake Tahoe. It was always “Reno-Lake Tahoe. See all the things to do in the multi-seasons.”

We promoted tour packages that travel agents could sell to their clients that involved a minimum of a two-night stay in our motels and hotels, which included food and beverages, some gaming discounts, and in the beginning, free shows. It would usually be the cocktail show, like at John Ascuaga’s Nugget, which had a full show. Later, we had some arrangements with Harrah’s and their showroom. The daytime activities were playing golf, horseback riding, and so forth in the warm weather months, and skiing in the winter months.

We even had a program we called Ski Reno, which was accommodating people to come to Reno, but ski at Mt. Rose, at Squaw Valley, and at Heavenly Valley, the resorts that were in place at that time.

In our promotions, we would create printed brochures that would be inclusive of all the activities they were going to get for a set price. In the beginning, they were tied in with a special airline rate that United Airlines, Western Airlines, and others would promote. They were called an I.T. package, or inclusive tour. We would get these low cost packages for the consumer if they’d purchase an airline ticket, and they got the best rate on the airline ticket by buying one of these inclusive tours.

The discounts had to accompany the ground arrangements that we provided for the travel agents to sell. We did it through various trade publications. We promoted it by printing brochures. We invited travel agents to come here and visit us at what were called

familiarization tours, or fam tours. Working closely with the airlines, we would provide free air for them. We’d get free rooms for them and then we would take them around, usually using coaches, to see all the attractions. We would do formal presentations for them so that they came away with a learning experience about what Reno and Lake Tahoe is all about.

Conversely, we would travel to those various communities with hotel representatives, rental car representatives, airline representatives, and the casinos representatives all together to Portland, Seattle, Vancouver, and Spokane. We’d branch out to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and ultimately all across the country: Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Atlanta, Georgia, New Orleans, and Dallas-Fort Worth. We would put on a dog-and-pony show where we would invite the travel agents and the airline representative to either a hosted breakfast, a luncheon, a dinner, or a cocktail presentation. We would put together a slideshow with musical background.

I usually would put those all together and do the voice work on them, as well as acting as the emcee for the whole program, initially with just Reno and Sparks. Later on, we incorporated all of Lake Tahoe. We partnered with the Visitors’ Bureau of South Lake Tahoe and had their personnel, their salespeople, and their hotel people with us. We would go a little bit broader, particularly in the further-away markets, like Denver, St. Louis, Cleveland, and so forth. It would be promoting a multi-night stay to see it all. Come to Lake Tahoe, come to Reno, gatewaying through the Reno Airport.

During this time were there any new casinos that opened or came along?

Well, the big growth was in the late seventies when MGM Grand built their big hotel that evolved into Bally's, then into the Reno Hilton, and then into the Grand Sierra Resort today. That was a time of phenomenal growth in hotel-building. The Sahara built the hotel downtown that became ultimately the Flamingo Hilton. It is now the Montage and is no longer a hotel. Several properties were built. The Pioneer Inn was building.... The El Dorado was built, and they became part of our promotional team. They, of course, had full gaming as well. With the El Dorado, they ultimately opened their showroom and we were packaging their kinds of activities as well.

From 1967, when I started with the Chamber, through 1977, there was the great growth of the hotels. As a matter of fact, I left to join one of the properties that was growing at that time, which was the Gold Dust Properties, including the Gold Dust West, which was downtown. John Cavanaugh was the owner and he literally hired me away from the Chamber to be his promotional guy. That didn't work out so well. It was a six-month involvement.

That was when I formed my own company after that, working with Durkee Travel Bureau, which had been the agency working with the Chamber of Commerce in a partnership to promote and sell the inclusive tour packages. It was a cooperative effort with Durkee Travel Bureau and, ultimately, I went to work for them.

The Chamber decided to leave that industry. In 1976, what was now the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors' Authority decided to take all of these activities in-house and hire their own staff. They no longer contracted with the Chamber for the Visitors' Bureau, the Convention Bureau, or the News Bureau. The Chamber then took a

totally different direction and got out of the tourism business. They concentrated only on developing new general business activities like a normal Chamber of Commerce would do.

That was a time of transition where the properties themselves were getting larger. They were very small properties when we were dealing with them for the Chamber. The largest hotel in town was probably the Holiday Hotel with two hundred rooms. The Mapes had two hundred and twenty. Riverside had a hundred and eighty. They were small properties.

When MGM opened, first with a thousand rooms which increased to two thousand rooms, and the Sahara downtown opened with six hundred to eight hundred rooms, they brought their full staff to play and did all their own marketing. They didn't rely as much on a communal effort like what the Chamber was doing. They were paying a room tax, though, and ultimately became involved with the Convention and Visitors' Authority when they took on those activities of the Convention Bureau and the Visitors' Bureau.

More and more, the hotels, as they grew larger, did more things in-house themselves. John Ascuaga's Nugget added their towers. Harrah's added additional towers. The El Dorado, the Silver Legacy, Circus Circus... Circus Circus came in pretty much self-contained to begin with and were not that involved in a community-wide basis. Later they became very well in the triumvirate of these—Circus Circus, the El Dorado, and Silver Legacy.... Later Harrah's joined in in that grouping.

At that time, the down-the-strip Peppermill was very small and only did accommodations. The Atlantis came after what was the Golden Door, a motel that we, with the Chamber, represented. They both grew into what is now the Atlantis and the

Peppermill properties respectively, and are quite self-sustaining on their own right where they are.

Outside of the casinos shows, do you remember any cultural activities that you were promoting in Reno at that time?

There was the beginnings of the Chamber Orchestra... the beginnings of the Reno Philharmonic were coming about in the mid seventies, and it had as much to do with the growth of the community as anything else. There were more people here to support the arts. The Chamber certainly recognized them and included their activities as part of the overall things to see and do in the Reno-Sparks area. The Nevada Opera was starting to gain ground and we included them as well.

So, yes, they were included in those things to see and do when you come to town and as activities that those who live here should be enjoying. They were a part of it, but again, they were their own 501(c)(3)s, so they were doing their own activities, their own fundraising, and gathering those who would be there to support and develop their future growth.

Many of the entities were fledgling at that time. They were growing. Sierra Arts was a very small organization. It was growing later into the eighties before it became something of an entity of note, if you will. All of these organizations were growing at a time when I was doing other activities. My career direction made several changes after that.

Can you tell me more about what the room tax funds were being used for?

Initially to build the Centennial Coliseum, which is now the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, and the downtown facility, the Pioneer. Ultimately, they continued to build more

things with the room tax money, like the Livestock Events Center, which includes where the rodeo is held and where the State Fair is held. That is property owned by the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors' Authority.

We knew that for leisure growth, we felt some pressure that we needed more golf. We only had two public courses—Washoe Golf Course and the Sierra Sage out in Stead. There was also the privately owned Hidden Valley Country Club. The Convention Authority took it upon themselves to create more golf opportunities by building the Wild Creek Golf Course in northern Sparks and the Northgate Golf Course out off of Mae Anne and Robb Drive in West Reno. They own those two to promote convention business with the activity of golf as part of it.

At the Chamber we built golf packages around those two golf courses and Lake Ridge, which was a privately owned public golf course built in the early seventies. They were investing in actual hard property while using their funds also to promote the area through general advertising and promotional activities.

It's my understanding that the Pioneer and the Centennial Coliseum were built fairly close in time to each other.

They were. The Centennial Coliseum opened in 1964 and was tied in with Nevada's Centennial, which was in 1964. It was called the Centennial Coliseum because it opened on the one-hundredth anniversary of the statehood of the State of Nevada.

They immediately started putting funding together and getting bonds to build a downtown center, which was the Pioneer. It opened in 1967—the same year I went to work for the Chamber. We were involved in selling into that as well.

Today, the Convention Center, which was the Centennial Coliseum, is still owned and operated by the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors' Authority. The Pioneer Center today is still owned by them, but is contracted out to another not-for-profit 501(c)(3)—the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts, Incorporated—that has a paid staff and a volunteer group of officers. I served on that board from 1994 through 2000 and I was vice president of that board for a couple of years.

When did the Convention and Visitors' Authority step back from actually running Pioneer?

If I'm recalling correctly, it was about 1990. They continued to provide funding to it, but it also was designed for that group to do its own fundraising, and bring in shows that would make a profit. That's when the *Broadway Comes to Reno* series started, bringing legitimate theater, mostly musicals, contracted through this new entity in order to raise money to pay for the facility. The Convention and Visitors' Authority continued to pay for upkeep, but it was up to this new board to also contribute to the upkeep. When we did a refurbish of Pioneer in the late nineties, most of those refurbishing costs were paid by this separate not-for-profit entity that was operating the facility.

When Pioneer was first built, what it was intended to be used for?

It was truly intended to be a convention center, yet it was never designed properly to be that. It was a political move to placate the downtown properties because the Convention Center was so far out of town at that time. There was virtually nothing out there. It was vacant fields all around it. Pioneer was

for the downtown hotels—the Mapes, the Riverside, the Holiday—so they would have a convention center that they could use.

It didn't turn out that way. It became much more of a performing arts center, and local organizations started using it pretty much from its inception. The beginnings of the Reno Philharmonic, the beginnings of the Chamber Orchestra, the beginnings of the Nevada Opera, and other shows that would try to come to town. The *Broadway* series, if I'm remembering correctly, wasn't brought to fruition until the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts board put together packages, hiring another broker to bring these shows to town.

When you served as a board member from 1994 to 2000, what were your responsibilities?

Actively promoting the use of the facility, overseeing the contracts that the staff were actively soliciting, and overseeing the promotional activities the staff were primarily doing. We were overseeing staff as a regular board would be, but we tried to step out and be the face of the center in community activities wherever we could possibly do it. We had good media coverage, so they were covering us fairly well. A combination of board members and staff members would be the face of the Pioneer. We were actively trying to bring attention to Pioneer and make it a facility that people would really enjoy.

By the late nineties, it had been around for twenty-five to almost thirty years and was showing some wear. It just had a lot of activities in there. We wanted to make sure it was a pleasant place to come visit and was up to standard as far as technical equipment for the lighting, the sound, and so forth. We were overseeing that, even though, again, staff would be the ones actually doing the contracting.

What has been the relationship with Pioneer and downtown and Pioneer and the casinos?

The casinos have been fairly good about supporting, the *Broadway* series and other special shows that came to town by buying blocks of seats for their clients. They'd bring in their out-of-town guests for these shows because they were pretty good shows. So that relationship was good. The casinos frequently had members serving on the board that were hands-on and knowledgeable of what was going on there. They were encouraged to utilize the facility whenever they could if something came that didn't fit their own property or was too large for them. They were very good about doing that. The casinos were supportive.

My understanding is that the rental for Pioneer is a bit expensive, but for community-based organizations, they get something of a break?

They get a good break. Yes, they do. There's a percentage, and I couldn't give you that off the top of my head, but they've always been good about that. They are also always good about saving dates for them and trying and not sell something from outside that had already been set aside for the Community Concert series or the Reno Phil.

Has Pioneer always placed a priority on community events?

I can't say it's uniformly been that way, no. I think you'd find those entities would say it's not been true. When I was there we made a major effort to make sure that those entities were well cared for and had the facility when they needed it, like their rehearsals. They were given a priority, and part of it was just good communications.

When we were laying out our *Broadway* series or any other traveling shows that we were planning to bring in we would sit down with them. They also had members sitting on our board. That wasn't always true, but we made sure that they always had representation on that board, so the communication became pretty good. If something came about and we knew well in advance, we could say, "This show from outside can only play on these dates. Can we shift the community concert by one week?"

With that much advance notice, they usually were very cooperative and they would say, "Sure, let's fill the building. That would work out fine." It became pretty good. If they had their dates locked in and they had their promotion out there, or their season tickets were under way and something came in, we wouldn't bump it. We'd try and find another way of working with the entity.

Pioneer is still owned by the Convention and Visitors' Authority, but is run by the separate nonprofit—do you think that that is generally working well for Pioneer?

As far as I know, it's working just fine. It's been a relationship that has matured. The staff level, particularly at the top... Willis Allen is the executive director there, and is an excellent communicator and has been very close to the people he needs to be with at the Authority. I think that the relationship is pretty good.

How is Pioneer as a facility?

It has vastly improved from what it had been. When the Reno Phil is in there, there's a shell that goes into the stage that funnels the sound in a way so that literally every part of the building gets a clear impression of all the

instrumentation. That is something that the Reno Phil paid for themselves, but as I recall, there were funds allocated from the Pioneer Center to help make that happen. It is also available to other performing groups so that they have good sound.

The electronic sound system has been improved over the years. They've continually added new lighting systems. They put in new seats and carpeting eight years ago, and I think it's a first-rate facility now. At one point it was not. It was run down and had not been maintained well. The sound and the sight lines were not as good as they are today.

Right now I think it's a very good facility. There was talk about having another.... That facility holds 1,500 people. There's a need for a good 2,500-seat facility. It is probably very lucky that we didn't build it five or six years ago because it would have been difficult under these economic times.

When things turn around, there will be a need for a good 2,500-seat facility, hopefully centrally located. The more we promote our downtown area, the better it is for the community and everything around the river. Those thoughts have been discussed and there have been plans drawn. I'm sure at some point it will happen. Fortunately, economically it didn't happen when it might have happened because right now the 1,500-seat facility is doing very well.

Have there been other physical places that the arts and culture has been focused around in Reno?

Oh, absolutely—the Lawlor Events Center. I spent a couple of years there as a part of the original staff in 1983. That was built with state legislative funding along with the facility in Las Vegas—the Clark Center. The Lawlor Events Center was built here at

the same time and designed to be part of the university. It is owned and operated by the university and gets very little state funding. It got very little state funding then. It's designed to be self-supporting with a professional staff that is university staff. I was on the university staff as part of the Lawlor Event Center when it opened.

It, of course, is the venue for the basketball team, both men's and women. In the beginning, it was only the men. The basketball team always gets first dates because it is a university function. That was a time... it held twelve thousand people when you put seats on the floor and about ten thousand people when you're just having basketball. For the first time it opened up a venue for the traveling rock-and-roll shows in the eighties. That was a big deal. It started in the early eighties when the big rock-and-roll shows were traveling the country to promote record sales at that time.

So the major promoters—Bill Graham Presents in particular—out of San Francisco, got very excited when they saw this facility going up. They came and started putting some contracts together to include in their western circuit, which would be normally Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, a stop in Reno in between.

In that 1983 to 1985 period, literally every major touring rock-and-roll group in the world was coming through Reno, and we had never seen that before. There had been some shows out at the Convention Center. I remember seeing, with my daughter, Chicago very many years ago. It wasn't ideal there. Lawlor, for a big arena show, was ideal.

They'd bring in all the staging. There were these big truckloads of equipment. They'd bring in all the lights and all the sound. We had shows like Genesis, Kiss, Hall and Oates, and Crosby, Stills & Nash. The rock-and-roll

shows of that era came here and we filled the place.

The town was anxious for something like this to come about, so for the first three years, it was quite a successful operation. It more than paid for itself in money going back into the facility. The contracts that we were able to write at that time with these shows coming to town were huge.

There also were occasional highbrow, if you will, cultural shows. Luciano Pavarotti filled the place to capacity with the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra as the orchestra of record for it. That was a phenomenal success. There were some other opera singers like that that came to town who were normal large-venue concert performers and now we had a facility for it.

For ten years at Lawlor Event Center, these kinds of shows, between the higher-brow culturally-oriented shows, the rock-and-roll shows, and large-venue events like truck pulls—not exactly a cultural event... we would lay down two feet of dirt on the floor and bring in these truck shows that were loud. The larger circuses would come to town with all their animals and again lay dirt on the floor. Lawlor was a venue that was able to handle that. So these kinds of shows came to town. The Lipizzaner Dancing Horses from Austria came through.

The venue, because of its size and its seating capacity, opened up opportunities for bringing things to town that people had not been able to see here. They had to go to Sacramento or the Bay Area to enjoy in the past. It was a large cultural advantage that Lawlor brought to town.

I know Lawlor still brings shows occasionally, but it doesn't seem as though it brings as many as maybe it did initially.

I think it started with Bally's (not MGM). Bally's did their summer outdoor shows. That took a lot of the summer touring shows away from Lawlor and put it out there. Bally's would be able to contribute funds to it because it created a crowd to come through their casino. They were able to negotiate with the traveling shows and Bill Graham and other promoters more effectively than Lawlor could, because Lawlor had to make money. Many of those shows that would have been traditionally at Lawlor ended up doing the outdoor venue at Bally's, now the Grand Sierra.

In addition to Lawlor and Pioneer, the Reno Sparks Convention Center, are there any other venues or locations that you remember in Reno that were able to provide a site and a source of cultural activities for people?

The MGM Grand had the *Hello, Hollywood*, *Hello Revue*, which was a phenomenal. At its time it was the biggest stage show in the world on a one-acre stage. When that show finished up its ten-year run, the theater became available for a lot of things. A lot of cultural activities used that facility because it held sixteen hundred people in, at first, a dinner-room setting. Ultimately, it became just cocktail service setting. It was certainly a venue that was used and continues to be used. A production of the *Nutcracker* is usually held there every year, although occasionally at the Pioneer there is one as well.

The Nugget showroom has been used for cultural activities. It used to be much larger than it is today. It used to hold about nine hundred people; it now holds about seven hundred. It was reconfigured thirty years ago.

Other smaller facilities... well, obviously, we were always hoping that the Lear Theatre would come to fruition, and it hasn't quite

happened yet. It doesn't appear to be very close to happening yet. The McKinley Arts Center has had some small success with some very small-venue activities.

Obviously, in Carson City, the Brewery Art Center has done some very nice things there as well. The basement of the Pioneer Center... they originally were going to make it kind of a black box, small-performance venue. It has been used for illusionist shows and things like that. I don't know what's going in there currently. The Reno Little Theater, which had its own facility until Circus Circus bought the property and they've been floating about... I guess they've been at Hug High School for a while.

The *Sheep Dip Show* has used various venues in town, starting at John Ascuaga's Nugget for its first twenty-one years, then at what was then called the Reno Hilton but became the Flamingo Hilton, one year out at the big Bally's, one year at the Pioneer Center, and then back to the Flamingo. We are now back to the Nugget. That's been a floating show between various venues over the years, hoping the audience would follow them.

It sounds there are a lot of venues potentially available. Do you think they're well utilized?

Oh, I'm sure anything could be used more frequently. The Pioneer Center has more vacant days than it has filled days. That's a shame to have a facility like that not utilized and not bringing people downtown. Part of it is just pure economics. These last few years have been difficult for every kind of performing venue as well as performing company. Discretionary funding is what it takes to go see shows, and one of the first things that you may have to give up if your funds are short would be going to see live shows. It's tragic, but it's true.

Plus, in virtually every community, particularly performing arts of a cultural nature, ticket sales don't begin to cover it. It has to be covered in some other manner. We have been very fortunate in our community to have such wonderful foundations that step forward frequently and support the performing arts. E.L. Cord Foundation, the Hawkins Foundation, the Reynolds Foundation, and many of that ilk have provided funds that allow us to bring these kinds of activities to our community that we couldn't afford if it were going to be based upon just ticket sales.

I know that you've been involved in the Sheep Dip Show from its beginning, literally. Can you tell me about when it started and how it first came to be?

It came about in 1964 as a fundraising idea for the Reno Advertising Club. The Advertising Club was made up of people in media, newspapers, television, advertising agencies, promotional agencies, and publicity firms. The club wanted to raise some money for its own needs so that it could possibly give money away, particularly to the university, because there was a struggling program within the journalism school for a sequence in advertising. The professionals belonging to the club thought, "Gee, it would be great if we, as professionals, could gather some of the money to help them get this thing going because there's our future. We're going to help raise people who want to spend a career in advertising."

The vice president of the club at that time was a man named Allen Dunn, who had his own advertising agency. He came up with the idea of copying a show he had seen in Washington, D.C. and in Las Vegas

called the *Gridiron*, which is a satirical show about the newsmakers in your community. They continue today through a press club in both Washington, D.C. and in Las Vegas. In Washington, D.C., obviously, it's on a national scale. In Las Vegas it had to do with things in southern Nevada.

We were looking to put together a show about news and newsmakers in a satirical vein in northern Nevada, so we began to pull people together to come up with a concept. 1964 being the Centennial, we thought that this would be the advertising community's gift to the state of Nevada—a show about Nevada in the northern part.

The Basque heritage of sheepherding is what was the genesis of the name *Sheep Dip*. Sheep dip, for those who herd sheep, is a vat full of cleansing elements that you dip sheep in to get vermin off their wool so that you can shear them. When you're clipping the tails of sheep, there is a cauterizing unit to cleanse the wound, if you will, so that the little animal can go on its way. So the concept was one of cleansing our newsmakers in the vat of satire called *Sheep Dip*, dipping them in it and cleansing them of all their sins, and sending them on their way to do it again. That's how the name came about.

The idea of doing a two-hour original production show was based upon a television show that was current at that time that David Frost, the British commentator and comedian, put together called *That Was the Week That Was*. It was a popular show on NBC in the 1960s. To this day, we are still using some of the elements from that show. They used what they call stool men—guys sitting on stools around a table who read narrative between sketches that were produced slightly away from that on the television set. We, today in our show, have a proscenium arch with a guy standing at a music stand on stage left

and stage right. We still call them stool men. They are the narrators that bridge the material between our sketches, our songs, our videos, and whatever else together.

So the format was *Sheep Dip Show: That Was the Year That Was*, as compared to *That Was the Week That Was*. We even used the musical theme, because we had a full orchestra. The show was being staged at John Ascuaga's Nugget. That was a contracted deal using their orchestra and we had that theme. The television show was [sings] "That was the week that was," and we took that theme [sings] "That was the year that was," and orchestrated it to run throughout the show.

So the writing started in the fall of 1964. We pulled together people who were pretty good writers, copywriters from ad agencies or media people. I happened to be one of those. I was brought in as a writer and ultimately as a performer.

When I first joined the group, I was finishing up my stint working at Channel 4 and I was about to go to work for an advertising agency. It turns out that the agency was the one that produced the first printed program for the thing. I ended up with them selling the first advertising that went in the program for the first show, so my involvement was selling ads, writing copy, and ultimately performing in the show. I was not an organizer as such. Allen and the officers of the Ad Club were the organizers. Getting the Nugget involved was kind of a coup.

The first show was held on a Sunday night in March 1965, in the middle of what was a run of a regular Nugget show. Allen Sherman, who sings "Hello mother, hello father", was the headliner, and they had Ray Anthony's Bookends. Ray Anthony was an orchestra leader that had a band that was fairly popular in the fifties and sixties. He had two women that he called The Bookends and they were the backup

act to Allen Sherman. They sang, they danced, they were pretty, they looked nice, they dressed up good, and we used them in the show. We were allowed to use them to present awards and stuff like that. They were show dressing because they dressed up nice. They looked good.

Allen Sherman was not scheduled to be on the show. It was going to be his night off, but he's in the audience... he's standing backstage, really, and about an hour into the show he says, "This is great. Can I go on?" So he went on for fifteen minutes. It had nothing to do with the rest of the show, but he did it. Allen Sherman came on. So the show was put together with the narrators narrating, film that had been shot—we didn't have tape in those days—to do mock commercials. Everything was satirical.

The printed program that we produced sold advertising, but you wouldn't know what your ad was going to be. To this day, we sell all of our ads with them not knowing what it's going to be. They are satirical. We produce them for them. You pays your money, you gets what you gets.

We had some friends of the family, if you will, who were dancers. Jan Savage had a lounge act. She was Allen Dunn's sister-in-law and she volunteered her time to teach some women how to dance, so we had some dancers on the stage. We had a small choral group led by Joe Battaglia, so we had a chorus to sing. We wrote satirical songs to popular music and we cast some people to sing songs. I sang with the Nugget's regular... the Nugget, in those days, in addition to the show, like Allen Sherman and Ray Anthony, had a production singer and production dancers.

That were on staff at the Nugget?

They were on staff. His name was Jim Ingram. They would have an opening production

number and he'd sing the production number. When they were done and the star act would come up. Of course, Bertha the elephant would be on the stage as well. It was wild. It was very different in those days.

Jim Ingram and a friend of ours in the agency business, Jim Miller, and I formed a trio. Our song was about the Riverside Hotel that had gone through an ownership change with at least three different groups claiming to own the place. We did the *Fugue for Tinhorns*, and each of us represented one of these owners. I don't know if you're familiar with the song. [sings] "I got the—." It's a fugue. [sings] "I got the deed right here." The other one goes [hums]. It goes on in a roundelay like that. We ended up with a standing ovation in the middle of our song, saying, "Oh, this is good stuff." That was my first performance.

So we had a series of songs like that and sketches. We had a sketch of a supposed promotional meeting of all of the casinos talking about promoting the area and I was playing Harold Smith, Sr.

Pappy Smith?

No, Pappy Smith was Raymond I. Smith. Pappy was the one who really was the brains behind the whole operation, as a sidebar. Raymond I. is the one that came to town, and brought his son Harold with him. He had been a carnival operator all over the West. He named the casino after Harold (without an apostrophe—Harolds). Harold came into the scene as well. There was another brother of Harold, Raymond A., who was part of the operation in the background for money. He was a money guy, but the real brains of the operation was the old man—Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith.

So the first year it went on and we didn't know whether there'd ever be another

one again. It was a one-time shot for the Centennial, and we filled the house on the one night, on a Sunday night in March of 1965.

The club had made money, and gave some money to the university. We said, "Well, gee, maybe we ought to consider doing this again." Truly, from that point, became an annual event for the first twenty-one years at the Nugget. The dates moved back into February and January, when it was likely that the room would be available to us. After twenty-one years, the Nugget decided to go to an all-year policy for their shows, and the venue just wasn't available to us. We left on great terms. There was no problem.

By that time, the Sahara had sold to the Hilton and it was called the Reno Hilton. It was a downtown hotel and it was available. We were there for three or four years. From there we went out to the Bally's, and then to the Pioneer. We spent one year at the Eldorado, then went back to the Flamingo Hilton, and then when that closed down, fortunately, the Nugget had changed their policies and welcomed us back. We've been there ever since.

When you were at the other venues, did they still have house performers?

They did not have their own house band. When we did the downtown Hilton was when we brought in Byron Peterson as our musical director and arranger. When we went out to Bally's, he contracted the band and put it all together. When we were at the Pioneer, he put it all together. When we went downtown, it was when we decided to go... the cost of the full orchestra and all, Byron suggested, "Let's go electronic." He had the equipment for it, and we've been electronic ever since.

We've not had a live orchestra probably for the last twenty years. It's all been electronic.

It sounds like a live orchestra and we record all of our voice work. Whether it's chorus or individual performers it is all click-tracked, which is a technical term. It's a recording that you play off a computer.

Has there been a tradition of having politicians who attend or who are part of the show?

In the early years, we had on the stage the then governor, Grant Sawyer, the then lieutenant governor, Paul Laxalt, the then treasurer of the state, Mike Mirabelli, and a county commissioner whose name escapes me. Grant Sawyer was playing the part of Tom Sawyer, wearing a straw hat, coveralls, barefoot, whitewashing the fence. "Whatcha doin', Tom?"

"Whitewashin'." The whole discussion was how politicians lie. It was extremely funny.

Getting them on the stage and rehearsing them was difficult because how do you do it? It's legislative time. It's crazy. We weren't able to do that very often. We did do it that time.

We did it one other time where we had Laxalt actually playing the part of Sawyer. That was hilarious because ultimately Grant ran for a third term and Laxalt beat him, so they weren't real friendly at that point. [laughs] It worked out okay. Every show has been kicked off with a video from the governor welcoming people to the show, with the exception of last year when Jim Gibbons refused to do it because we had picked on him so badly the year before. We didn't have Jim do it; we had Dawn do it. Dawn welcomed them from her little shack in the back of the mansion. We had the camera following her back through this. She opens the door and says, "Hi! Welcome!" Funny as could be, and she actually showed up at the show.

Every governor in between has done that, and Sandoval did it this year. He did a

wonderful job. He's obviously photogenic and he's very gracious. He came to the show Friday night and stayed afterwards. All those pictures you saw were taken because he stayed. He was having a great time. Much of the cast went down to have their picture taken with him. He promises he'll be there for the show next year and if we want to use him somehow, that he'll do it.

Well, in the meantime, he's going to be the governor for a year. That doesn't make us easy on him. This "no taxes" thing is going to come back and bite him. We all know that.

At any rate, we have at different times had real people playing themselves. Many years ago there was a story of Charlie Mapes having gone for an elephant hunt in Africa, and the story came out—and we all knew it was true—that he did shoot an elephant, but it was a pet elephant of a village in the deep dark part of the jungle. They set it up and he shot this poor old elephant. Well, the story came out, so we did a thing on him.

Two things, most underused elements.... We had a character playing Charlie, paying his money to have the right to go shoot the elephant to a cashier's cage on a stage. It was just like a bar set up here and a cage here. We had Bertha the elephant's trunk come out to take the money. The most underused elephant ever—just the trunk came out.

At the end—and it was a fairly funny sketch—you could see there's a guy at the end of the bar who's not really doing anything but sitting there laughing. At the end of the sketch, he turns around, it's Charlie Mapes himself. So he was able to laugh at himself. The whole sketch was about this clown that went over and shot a town's pet.

So at different times, we've had people... when Harrah's was accused of selling off all the auto collection before it became what it is today.... That was when Harrah's sold to

Holiday Inn. Holiday Inn said, "We don't want to keep these things." Phil Satrey was the exec who went from Harrah's to Holiday Inn and took the whole thing to Memphis. There was a big brouhaha because 75 percent of the collection is gone because they sold it. There was nothing organized here yet to try and save it in any way. By the time it was put together to save what was... they got some very good vehicles out of it, but it was a bad situation all the way around.

Randolph Townsend was kind of the driving force of keeping it here and giving holy hell to Holiday Inn for what they did. We had Randolph and Phil on the stage together bantering back and forth, so that was a real use of real people.

Over the years, we've attempted to do it and it's just more and more.... Frankly, the show has become very rehearsed and professional and it's difficult to get people to spend that time with us. Mayor Geno Martini from Sparks last year spent a long time with us in rehearsal and did his part beautifully. After it was all done, said, "I can't do it again. It just takes too much time away from what I have to do."

So we are looking now... some of us are already thinking ahead to number fifty. We just finished forty-seven or forty-eight this year. For number fifty, we are trying to reprise as many real people as possible, possibly having to do it all on tape... interspersing a lot of faces of real people. If you get them to come to the stage, number one, what they do is they bring their crowd with them. It sells tickets. It's really to our advantage to have as many newsmakers actually play themselves as possible on the stage. We're going to attempt to do that, and we'll do it some more this year and the next year as well.

Those are the ones that come to mind where it was highly successful when we used

them and they got a big kick out of doing it when they did it. I had Katy Simon sing—the manager for the county—when I directed number forty. She’s a great singer, and very few people know that. She sings garbage rock-and-roll in Truckee. It’s really weird.

She used to live in Truckee before she became the county manager and used to sing garbage rock-and-roll up there. She’s very funny. She has a beautiful voice, so we had her singing show tunes and she had a great time. This happened to be, for her, a time when there was a lot of ugly pressure going on from some of her country commissioners. We became her release, where she could go hide and they couldn’t find her. She had a wonderful time, but after it was all done, said, “I can’t ever do that again.” She had a wonderful time doing it, though, and was a tremendous performer on stage—very energetic and looked good. She has a terrific voice. We try to get people like that where we can.

We’ve had Cami Thompson back many times. She’s a *Sheep Dip* brat because her dad, Don Thompson, was one of the originators as well and has been on the stage many times. He has kind of retired. He has not been involved recently. When I directed number forty-one, I had Cami back, and she did a great job. She had been on several times in the show and does it gratis. She is a professional singer. That’s how she makes a living. She even came to my retirement party and sang for us.

Last year, when you had Dawn Gibbons do the introduction... it sounds like the politicians and public figures are generally good sports about it.

Yes, with no exception. Well, one exception. [laughter] One exception. They’re all good sports about it. When Kenny Guinn came in, he knew nothing about *Sheep Dip*. He’s a southern Nevada guy. We had to spend

some time with him and show him clips of what was done before. He said, “I get it,” and did wonderfully and became a fan. He came to the show a couple of times and was great to work with. If they’ve been raised in northern Nevada, as Sandoval was... he’s a northern Nevada guy. He’s seen the show before. He knew what it was all about. It was not a problem to him at all. He was ready to step in, and he’s such a natural performer. A lot of the others are not natural. They’re very stiff at it. Bob Miller was very stiff at it. He got better as he went along, but he had trouble. Bob List was very stiff, but he got it.

I’m assuming since we’ve had both Democratic and Republican governors, that it’s bipartisan or an equal opportunity—

Insult. Absolutely. We insult equally. Party affiliation means nothing. If you do something that we feel can be satirized or has another point of view, we’re going to take that.

The Shaft Awards are presented to those who have been particularly egregious in their previous times. This year, as an example, we gave it to the editor of the *Gazette Journal*, who had this wonderful series of stories about DUI and, of course, went out and got himself a DUI. He was very gracious about how he handled that and brought us a \$500 check.

Hot August Nights, with all of the stuff that’s going on—the rumor of going to Long Beach and so forth—got the Shaft for just badly handling how their public relations was handled. We had the original guy, Willie Davison, present the Shaft Award to them. That got a little testy because he was not a popular guy, in particular. Each year we present it.

One year, we presented it to then Mayor Jeff Griffin for the train trench and imploding the Mapes Hotel. The popular opinion was that

he was all wrong for having done that. Several years later when it proved, number one, the Mapes was impossible to be saved, and, and number two, look how great the train track has turned out (it's stimulated business around it and so forth), we did a Shaftectomy. We took it away from him. A couple of years ago before the Reno Aces opened, we gave a shaft to the Aces, saying, "Triple-A baseball's not going to work here. We're a terrible sports town." Two years later we gave them a Shaftectomy. "You're a huge success. We were wrong." We are very good about giving ourselves the same treatment as we have given to others. Of all the years, there were only two Shaftectomies. We were right all the other times.

Are there other people who have been involved for many years in the show, or have been particularly important to Sheep Dip?

Mark Curtis, Sr. You're familiar with Mark Curtis, Jr. and the things he's done. Mark Curtis, Sr. was an executive with Harrah's for many years, was a partner in an advertising agency, was a very creative writer, and also was good at the podium. He was one of our original stool men. He was a terrific writer and with us for many years until he retired. I'd say he was involved for eighteen to nineteen years. He's deceased now.

Joe Midmore was a newspaper writer, and worked with me at the Chamber of Commerce for a while. He also was a lobbyist in Carson City, and was particularly good about writing stories having to do with state government and legislature because he was so involved with it. He could turn them into hilarious satirical sketches with pure skill that he had as a writer and his ability to know the information so very well. He is also deceased.

Art Johnson, who was the curator of the Planetarium for many years and a very

creative organist, brought us great satirical music around operettas. We had some full-fledged, almost full-stage operettas with full-costumes that he wrote and directed. He was very creative on the musical side. Jim Bemis was another person who was very creative with music, satirical lyrics, and a great on-stage performer as well.

Over the years, I've written some pretty good stuff. I've written for every show, though not so much sketches. I've mostly written the stool material or material for videos.

We've had a lot of very creative people shooting the videos for us. Don Dondero, who's deceased, was a great still photographer and also did some very good motion-picture stuff. Bill Bleichner in the very early years had his own company for filming and did some very creative things. Jerry Vanlaningham is a very good still photographer and did a lot of video work as well. These are people who brought their talents with them that they already had.

For some of us, writing sketch material was something separate and apart from what we normally did, but we learned how to be pretty effective at that kind of writing. We always had the writers of *Sheep Dip Show* be anonymous. We never list them in the program because, in theory, everything you write is copywritten when you're done with it, but we don't put our name to it necessarily. There are possible legal issues out there that we don't want to play with. Again, there's been a variety of people who have written over the years.

The people performing in the show initially were pretty much from the media. We added people who were friends of media, so we had lawyers, we had... take your pick of a profession. A few physicians came in because they were friends of people in the media. As the Ad Club drifted away from

being interested in *Sheep Dip* anymore.... That came about with the merger of the club with the Reno Women in Advertising and the merged club became a part of the Advertising Association of Northern Nevada. They each separately brought to their union a series of activities mostly involved in the profession, whether it be training people to speak to classes or things that were for the betterment of the individual in their particular discipline within the community of advertising.

Sheep Dip Show became kind of an albatross, sitting there all by itself. It wasn't necessarily where this new merged organization wanted to go. Very few of the members were involved with it. We were a committee of the Ad Club and we reported to them and gave them money. There was a foundation formed that I chaired for thirty years that dispensed the funds out of the *Sheep Dip Show*, primarily to the university's advertising sequence, but a few other things as well.

After two years, the merged organization voted to disassociate themselves, leaving *Sheep Dip* free on its own with funding to get it going. That was when we formed our own 501(c)(3) *Sheep Dip, Incorporated*, and they have been that way now for ten years.

Because there was nobody from those two clubs really involved—they weren't the performers, they weren't the writers anymore.... There's a whole new batch of people who are doing that, and some of them are in media, but most of them aren't. The people involved, like Dave Finley, Brent Boynton, and J.J. Christy, are existing people in the media and have been for a long time, and they are still part of us.

The onstage performers like Shelby Sheehan and Sara Johns don't do any writing, but they come and perform for us.

The people who are now involved in the day-to-day operating have little to do with

media anymore. It's just plain folks. You name it—lawyers, accountants, truck drivers, people involved in the health industries, and people who are not in professions at all. It's quite a mix of people. It's not like it was, though—a close family of media types. It's just not that anymore.

However, the family of *Sheep Dip* has gone on all these years and many of us have been doing it a long time. We do certain recognitions after a certain number of years of being involved with the show. The first recognition we did we called the Doctor of *Sheep Dip*. That was a minimum of seven years' involvement in the show in a variety of responsible tasks. You're voted in by those who are already doctors.

A little bit later we formed—this was in early seventies—the Masters of *Sheep Dip*. Those are for five years of involvement and it could be in any capacity. You've been with us for five years and you've given of yourself. By golly, we want to recognize you. So there are 150 masters now and there are about 99 doctors over all of these years, and many of those people are still directly involved. Some are deceased—we've lost fifteen over the years. Some people have just gone away or moved out of town. Of the doctors, though, there's probably a good fifty of us, at least, who are still, in some way, involved with the show. So it's a family that goes on and on.

We gather in March for a dinner to start planning for the next year. The planning has already taken place because *Sheep Dip, Inc.* is an ongoing organization that meets monthly. It has a fiduciary responsibility for all the funding, selecting the charities to which the money should go, and giving overall broad direction. The producer and director of each year's show reports to the board of *Sheep Dip*. It's like a committee, if you will, within an organization.

We have our first organizing dinner in March and then we have a picnic potluck gathering in July. It's traditionally called the Mimosa Party because it used to be held in the backyard of one of our people who had a big mimosa tree that was in bloom in July. We just went for the blooming of the mimosa, and that was our summer gathering.

Then by that time, all of the responsible positions have been assigned—creative director, creative producer, film director, and so forth. Through all this time we've been collecting clippings. Every day's newspaper is clipped for items that might be considered for inclusion in the show. You get a huge—if you can imagine—amount of stuff out of that.

The creative process usually starts in August with writing. The creative process for the program ads is a separate group and they usually start in September. They create the ads that have been sold by the salespeople. The writing starts in August, with rewrites and so forth going on. That includes all the material—the sketches, the songs, the videos. They are all created by this group. The actual stool material is pretty much written by a separate group, but in cooperation with the creative director so we're not overlapping material and so it has a cohesiveness to it. The actual writing is done by about four of us.

Who attends the shows?

It is as broad as a community is broad. We try and promote it in as many outlets as we can—e-mail blasts, public service announcements on television and radio, newspaper ads, publicity stories, and word of mouth. It's the job of every Sheep Dipper to get out there and sell tickets as much as we possibly can. It is a broad base.

We have some people who have literally been with us almost from the beginning.

They come every year. Barbara Vucanovich, the former congressperson, and her daughter, Patty Cafferata... I don't think they've missed a show in thirty years, and they have been in the show.

It's just a broad appeal. I promote to my golf club out at Red Hawk and many of them do come. They get a kick out of it. It's wherever we can reach it. I've done presentations to OLLI and we've had many OLLI people come. Wherever we can get the word out.

It's different from the early years, because in the early years, we were the only thing going on in January. You had New Year's and then you had Valentine's. There was just literally nothing going on. It was a small, close-knit community and it was fairly easy to sell out a show because there was nothing else going on. We were not expensive and we were going to be fun.

As the town grew and more people came to town who knew nothing about *Sheep Dip* or cared less about the politics or the business of the town... it's difficult to reach them. As it grew, there are so many more activities now going on all through January and February, that we're just one of many. It's not an easy thing to do. Even though you have a bigger population to draw on, until you catch their attention, you're not going to get them.

Have there been any skits or particular shows that have been favorites of yours?

This year was a good show because it was so balanced. We were salient to the material at hand. We gave a Shaft to those who said we were going to have a bear hunt. That's still making ripples all over the town. We decided you can do it as long as you hunt bare. We don't know where you're going to keep your ammunition, but that's your problem. [laughter]

The whitewashing with Grant Sawyer was such a good use of a real personality because he was a genuine strong personality, and a very popular governor, who just jumped in because he's a ham. He loved it and did that well.

There was a year when all of the members of the Assembly from northern Nevada were Republicans. They advertised as a bloc. They got elected as a bloc. Every one was Republican, and we had a training session for them by a guy named Don Manoukian. Don Manoukian is a rabid Democrat who just tore them apart beautifully, yet we had great material for them to fire back. But we had all of them on the stage. It really was funny, and Manoukian was so incredulous that this should happen to him.

The second year I directed, which was the sixth year of the show (I directed five, six, and seven), I had an opening number called *The Aquarius Opening*, where dancers on the stage held a shield in front of them, each with a different sign of the zodiac. They danced real simple movements, but the "Aquarius" song carried it very well.

As a sidebar to that, that was a year that we had three shows—a Friday dinner show, a Friday cocktail show at midnight, and a Saturday night dinner show. In between the shows, the cast would go upstairs and [whistles]. The audience, by the time they got there [whistles]. So you've got lots of alcohol both on the stage and off. The dancers had a terrible time figuring out what to do on that opening number. I literally would put my nose on the stage right down front and I directed them on when to go out and do things.

We're ready to start the show for midnight. I'm looking up there, and the dancers are ready to go and there are two shields with nobody behind them. They're upstairs asleep. They never made it to the show. [laughter]

However, it still was fun... the thing worked. It just had a life to it that was a lot of fun.

The first time we did a takeoff on *The Wizard of Oz* was a lot of fun. I played the part of the cowardly lion. My wife Pat played the part of the cowardly lion this year. We reprised it. That was fun. "You've got to have courage."

I remember the various Shaft recipients who came on and were so gracious in the way they received it. Bill Raggio because he is so proud.... He's had it three times, and has them in his office. He's proud of the fact that he got the Shaft Award.

The year that Wells Fargo came to town and really took over the big banks, like First Interstate Bank... their computer just was terrible, they had bad relations in their branches, and just everything they did turned to garbage. It was just awful, so, of course, they got the award that year. There was a gal who was a vice president for Wells Fargo who was selected to receive the Shaft. They knew what they were getting. They knew that it was coming for them. Sarah Beth Brown was her name. She got up on the stage, took off a shirt, and she had a t-shirt under it that had a great big red target on it that read "Let it fly. We're ready for it." She presented us a \$10,000 check, so that was a gracious way of handling that kind of thing. It comes down to some individuals who were so gracious. Even though they made asses of themselves, they handled it with aplomb and with some good humor and had interesting things to say back.

Some of the production numbers were just particularly strong. There was a year we had a big vat of sheep dip and we were dumping things in it that were so bad. That was when the first Iran crisis and Ayatollah Khomeini... we threw an Ayatollah Khomeini into the vat. That got a standing ovation. Every year has its own charm. People will come up to us every

year and say, "That was the best one ever." All right, it was the best one this year. They've all been pretty darn good. There have been very few that have been bad.

One year, we had a producer who decided to change everything. He told all those people that had been in the show, "You've got to try out in order to be on the stage." It was not the family thing that we'd been used to. It created animosity among some people who just never came back. They just went away, including some very good writers. The next year's show had nobody who wanted to write. It was just a real downer. Literally, the show was going to be in first of February and we're at the first of December, we didn't have a show written. We had fragments of things. We met in the old Prospectors' Club, which at that time was in the Mapes Hotel. There was about five of us sitting around. Don Cralle was the president of the club and was going to be the producer that year. We had the stacks of scraps from the clipping service and the stacks of ideas, but nothing has been written. What will we do?

I said, "Give it to me." Over the next two days I parceled it out to about three different people and we wrote a show. It wasn't the best show we ever did, but, by god, it was a show. We made it and we had an audience. It was okay and we got it back again. We got our mojo back and away it went. So there are things like that that have happened. We've always had a time where somebody stepped up and "Let's change things. Let's do something a little different and make it better and get more people involved."

We had an influx of new people who had been involved with Hot August Nights. We got them as a gang all at one time. They had great enthusiasm and were used to the concept of volunteering. They knew that it takes hours to get things done and they jumped in. They wanted to be dancers, guys as well as gals,

and we hadn't had guys before. That's when we had the Struttin' Mutton with the new guy dancers. So there was an influx of fresh blood... of new people who knew how to volunteer and had a great enthusiasm and were very creative. They gave us a big boost of adrenalin to some who had said, "Oh, boy, got to do it again, huh?"

Fortunately, we've been able to gather new people every year that infuse a new point of view and a new enthusiasm, which picks everybody up. Particularly when you've been through maybe four weeks of rehearsals and you've heard this material, it's not funny anymore. Then you hit dress rehearsal and suddenly it seems funny. How about that? During the first night's show the place is falling apart. "Oh, that's why we wrote that, because it was funny. We forgot that." You've been rehearsing it so much...

You worked in development and marketing at Channel 5 for fifteen years. How was KNPB involved in cultural activities?

It is itself a cultural organization. We did some things cooperatively with Reno Phil that raised a lot of money for us for a while. We had on both of our boards one guy who happened to be the president of Porsche Cars North America. He says, "I got an idea." That's when he donated us a Porsche 911 with the proceeds from the sale of drawing tickets to go to both organizations.

The first year we did it we just did the drawing and had a little gathering up at the university to pull the ticket, and we did okay with that. Then we decided to go ahead and create an event with the Philharmonic performing and we promoting the heck out of it. I emceed it and did all of this stuff. We sold more tickets and added an event, and then added food to it and added beverages

to it. It grew and grew, and then it leveled off. Porsche eventually moved to Atlanta so we had to start buying the car—at a discount, but we still had to buy it. It got to the point that we finally said, “We’ve got to let this go. It’s just not working anymore.” It was a very close relationship with the Reno Phil and we had a great time working together on that.

Other relationships have been purely promotional or we are involved by me serving on the board. I was on the staff at KNPB when I was on the Pioneer board. Pat Miller has been very involved with Sierra Arts, again, as a staff member of KNPB. There is a lot of individual effort from staff members within the culture community.

Primarily we worked together on projects or promoted the heck out of them using our airwaves for it. We were always trying to be part of the culture community, for sure, and then, as you say, being part of it ourselves just because of what we put on the air.

Describe what your position was.

I was Vice President for Development and Marketing, with development meaning all the fundraising activities, the individual memberships, the corporate memberships, and corporate sales for underwriting various programs or program strands. For the marketing and promotion of the station and all that we had to do and those that we marketed with... staging what was an annual fundraising auction, and producing it on air. My project was to produce it on the air. I did virtually all of the on-air or voiceover work for the station, whether it be the promotional or commercial side. We wore a lot of hats. It’s a small staff doing a full-service station, which in a lot of other markets would have ten people, but three of us would do all sorts of

stuff. That goes with the territory in a smaller market.

So you were responsible for both fundraising for and promoting KNPB, but it sounds like you had a two-way relationship with other people.

That’s correct. Wherever we could do things cooperatively, it was always to our benefit to do that. It just gave you a greater bang for the buck, that’s all. So, again, working with Reno Phil, yes, we were equal. We were right up there promoting their concerts and anything that they had to do. We helped them with their fundraising whenever we could.

Besides Reno Philharmonic, what other organizations were you working with?

Community Concerts on an ongoing basis. We promoted the heck out of them. Again, one of our staff members was a member of their board and wherever we could help promote that we would. If we had an outlet for interviews and things like that, which we rarely did because we’re not a news operation, we would do that.

When the legislature was in place, we covered that thoroughly with our counterpart in Las Vegas. We did that cooperatively for many years. We raised the funds jointly and ran the programs on both of our stations. The Legislature certainly knew what we were all about, which was to our advantage because we get a little bit of money out of that. We didn’t get much, but you want them to think kindly towards Public Broadcasting.

We did some things cooperatively with KUNR. Not a lot, but they’re doing more now. They’re doing a lot more Legislative coverage. We try to do things cooperatively where we can cross-promote one another.

Public Broadcasting seems to be a place where people can be exposed to cultural things that they may not otherwise. What is the link between public broadcasting and cultural events and the arts?

I think it goes hand in hand. As an example, when we're doing pledge drives on air, we will have, let's say one of the Great Performances Concerts that we'll use as a vehicle to have people call in. We will use, as a phone group, one of the cultural groups of town and then promote their upcoming activities. Again, we've done that with the Phil. We've done it with the Opera. We've done it with Community Concerts. We've done it with the Chamber Orchestra. We allow them to have face time, while we're raising money, to talk about their events and how you can get tickets for it and so forth. We've done that for forever... for about thirty years.

Is it a part of PBS' mission to expose people to cultural things?

Yes, it is. We've done, over the years at different times, things that go between the programs that we've produced for various cultural organizations so that they can get their word out, like a two-minute piece rather than a thirty-second spot with a little more in detail.

We are using the airwaves to entice people to have more of an educational side. Lord knows, with the kids' programming, that has such a strong push for additional preschool education. Our Kids' Club is all designed for children to be more involved in reading and outreach projects like that.

For some of the commercial things, we've done things with Scolari's, where we've had events there, or we've used the Safari Zoo for

events to learn about the animals and listen to the docent really talk about it. We've certainly done it with the Museum of Art... using the medium to expose people to the idea that they should know more about these other entities.

Can you tell me how and when you became involved in the balloon races?

Balloons have been going since 1982, when they had twenty balloons. In 1983 they kicked it up to seventy or eighty balloons, and then they decided they wanted to have a sound system and somebody to announce it. I was just simply asked to do it. I knew the organizers. One was Peggy Gold, who used to work for me, and the other was Candy Pearce. She was with Harrah's while overseeing the committee to try and put the whole thing together.

I had seen a balloon race once when it was out at the air races but knew nothing about it. Fortunately, on the stage where they had me set up, the launch director—the person in charge of all the safety aspects having to do with putting the balloons in the air—was right there. I could hear what he was saying, and would take what he's saying and turn it into layman's terms. That was how I learned to talk balloon.

We had, that first year, the Dawn Patrol. I tried to describe what that was and didn't do a real good job of it. For the next several years, they brought somebody in who just described the Dawn Patrol. He was a balloon guy himself who did it, and then I got the hang of it. About the third year, we started adding music. We hadn't had music before. One year, we had the Philharmonic live. Early morning, frozen fingers. Oh, those poor people. We did it only once. It cost \$10,000. It was too much.

Then I started putting together musical scores for it, and I've updated it maybe three times over the years. I'm going to do another update this year. All the music that is in there is all done to the mood of the moment. For the early morning, there's a certain sound to it. It's very mellow... a little bit of beat, but mostly mellow. When we have the Glow Show, where the balloons are just tethered and have the light-bulb effect with the burner burning, I have a special music setup for that. Then we do a competitive thing we call Dueling Balloons using the "Dueling Banjos." [hums]

I put together a whole different thing for the Dawn Patrol, part of it for when they're on the ground getting ready to stand up, and then for when they actually lift off. It's all different. Then intermediate music is a little bit of a different mood, and then for the liftoff it's very uplifting—real high-energy-level stuff.

I've got a different set of music for Saturday, but Friday and Sunday is the same. I'm going to create a new Sunday for this year and then we'll have something a little bit different each day, but the mood of the moment will remain the same. It'll just be different selections.

So in that, I've learned balloon just by doing it. We've had cancellations where it rained, so my claim to fame was... their competition was throwing Frisbees at a target out of a lift after they've been drinking champagne. They weren't very good shots. [laughter]

There was a morning when a bank of fog came in that we had never seen before and the Dawn Patrol was above it. We can't see them but you can see little glows through the fog, and they couldn't come down till the fog went away. That was a very strange morning. We've been rained out only three or four times, and most of the time it's been just almost perfect.

I know the balloon races are a very big event in Reno. What's the importance to Reno of having these big well-known events?

Oh, I think it's very big, not only for those who come from out of town, but for the locals. It is just something to be proud of. The fact that it's free is a very big deal. It's nothing like the Albuquerque Festival at all. I've been to that and I wouldn't like to be like that, frankly. I was not impressed. Ours is very carefully staged in a particular venue. The balloonists are particularly skilled. It's really an invitational.

It's free, although it's getting more difficult to do that because our underwriting is more and more difficult to get. Economics have hit everyone and events are having the same kind of difficulty. We've had phenomenal crowd because it's free, and we still put on a great show and people still love it. We do have out-of-towners, but not nearly as much compared to the air races or Hot August Nights. It's an event that makes everybody feel awful good. It's classy. It's pretty. I think it has real intrinsic value for livability here.

Just to wrap up, can you comment on general changes that you've seen in cultural organizations, and the availability and access to activities and events in Reno?

I think pure population growth, and perhaps a better-educated population has led to the ability of our cultural organizations to grow and to serve. Just the critical mass of people it takes... critical mass of people with the financial wherewithal to invest, and the critical mass of educated people that these kinds of events and cultural activities have an importance to them. It's a relatively small number of people who have the desire and the financial ability to invest properly in those things that we need.

We have grown, I think, exponentially in that direction over the years I've been here. As the university continues to grow and turn out people educated, and as more people bring their interests to town where they have had experience elsewhere on how to run a Philharmonic, how to run an Opera, we all learn from that.

I think we've grown beautifully and will continue to, and I think our venues have responded by having proper size and scope to present things properly. I look at our Artown activities in the summer where they're all over the place in the beautiful outdoor venues downtown and Bartley Ranch. What a phenomenal facility that is. We haven't even touched on that. There are opportunities we never had before, with people interested to create those opportunities and people who are interested to be involved in them. It's been a great growth and I think we're nothing but great for the future.

As we have diversified our economy, we have brought in higher-end jobs because of the kinds of work that they're doing, and most of those are people that are a little bit higher educated and brought a sense of culture with them. Whatever it might be, they're willing to set their roots here and invest in this community as their own, and bring their expertise, their knowledge, their experience, and their money with them.

With the growth of the university, we have grown our own who are used to cultural activities on the campus. There are tremendous things going on out there visually, and in a performance sense. These people are willing to, again, set their roots even deeper and invest themselves and their capital into what it's going to take to keep this cultural growth growing.

JANE SUNDAY

Allison Tracy: Can you tell about where you were born and where you grew up?

Jane Sunday: Berkeley, California. I lived there some, went to school there some, but also lived in Marin County and San Francisco at different times. I moved around quite a bit even within the same cities. So my roots are definitely Bay Area. I actually went to college in Hawaii first, for a year, which was a wonderful experience. I lived with an aunt and uncle. Then I came back and went to a junior college in Marin County for a year and finally finished at Berkeley.

I lived in San Jose fifteen years, where my boys all went to school almost through high school, before we moved up here. I've been here in Reno for thirty-six years.

Can you tell me about your parents?

My dad moved around profession-wise a lot, although he ended up with a framing and art store in San Francisco. My mother always worked. She worked for the state of California,

for the Employment Division. She was a very neat lady.

Were there any special interests that contributed to your dad opening up the framing and art store?

I think so. He didn't do artwork himself. At one time he was asked to judge a show at one of the minor prisons near Sacramento. He was always interested in art, and I guess I got a lot of that too.

What do you remember of your elementary, middle, and high schools?

In Berkeley, I went to Oxford Elementary School for some of it, but then I'd also gone to two or three others before that. I went to middle school, or junior high, in Berkeley and also in Santa Monica, California. We lived down there a couple of years during World War II. I came back and went to Berkeley High, then went over to Marin County and finished high school at Tamalpais High.

Do you remember any art, music, or theater programs at any of these schools?

Actually, I don't remember too much in the lower grades. When I was taking teaching-training classes at Berkeley, I did some art projects that were fun and successful. I remember having music in elementary school, which I enjoyed. Unfortunately, a lot of that is not offered as much as it used to be.

What was happening in the Bay Area culturally as you were growing up there?

I remember my parents, my mother particularly, attending classical music and opera. My mother and my dad's sisters went to see Lily Pons at the San Francisco Opera House, where it was standing-room only. She was always very much involved in symphony and opera in San Francisco.

What brought you to Reno?

Well, my husband's job brought us here in 1975. I went to work for a lumber company for a little while and then with the County at the Planning Commission, when it was the general planning commission for the whole area. It was a really good job; I was so new here and I was exposed to a lot of the people that were important in the community, and I learned a lot about the people. It was also at the time that MGM was opening up. It was incredibly busy and a very good opening for me.

From there, after a couple of years, I went over to the assessor's office and then became an appraiser, which was an excellent move and opportunity for me. I evaluated residential properties and worked at Incline Village in the summers.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first arrived?

The snow. [laughs] I had never lived in snow before. I remember it snowed right when we moved in. It was a different kind of area, but I learned to like it a lot. I know one thing that really impressed me was Governor O'Callahan, who was in office at that time, had his phone number in the phonebook. [laughs] That really impressed me because you could be that close to your leaders in the state.

I found the people very accepting. I was divorced shortly after that, so that it was important that I connected with people, and there were some very good support groups. That was another place where I branched out, learned about people, became acquainted, and found activities.

What kind of activities did you get involved in?

I got into birding and the Audubon Society. I was really heavy into that for several years and became president at one time. There was a little group of us that used to go out camping—dirt camping out in the desert or out in the hills someplace. I learned a lot about Nevada that way. It was great.

Do you remember becoming involved in any cultural activities at that time?

Not really, until I got into Elder College. I've been a member here since 1995. Actually, I may have come to classes the year before that, way back when you didn't have to be a member to come and you could pay for classes. That was shortly after it had started. There were art classes going on.

How did you find out about Elder College?

I know I got things in the mail. I think I was aware of it for a while before I actually joined. This was a year or two after I retired. Then I also made new friends through Elder College.

How did Elder College get started?

As I understand it—and some of this is in our books out on the table—Neal Ferguson, in 1980, had the idea. This had occurred to him, but it didn't get off the ground then until the spring of 1991 when the first classes were offered. I guess they had thirty-five members, or people who attended the classes, anyway.

It was also associated with Elderhostel at that time. Carolyn Vaught was connected with the university, and she served as liaison between Elder College and Elderhostel. They later dropped that association and we became completely independent under the umbrella of the university.

It gradually grew. They used to have to meet on campus, which was more difficult in terms of time, space and parking. Once we got our own dedicated area in the Nelson Building, it really made a difference and it grew a lot very quickly. By 2002, which is when I became curriculum chair, we were happy if we had three hundred members. We felt like we were successful then, and we were. In fact, there are people now that complain about the fact it has grown so big. It used to be smaller, more intimate. A lot of those people are gone now.

What was the mission of Elder College?

Actually, there is a mission statement. I can't believe Neal Ferguson's idea was for older people to keep their brains going and be active and social. Of course, it is a very social group

too. The kinds of classes we have depend a lot on the people available to give them, either by members themselves or anybody from the community. The fact that we can use people from the university is wonderful.

When did you start serving on the Curriculum Committee?

I was secretary first. That must have been about 1999 or 2000. I was secretary for a couple of years, and then a friend of mine, Bette Jensen, who was curriculum chair, and asked me to do a series of classes in 2002. I did a series called *Reno With a Twist*, and got six or eight speakers with it. Tom King was one of them, talking about gaming and Reno history. It was a good series. I found people very responsive and willing: Ron James, Neal Cobb and Carl Breckenridge, Dwayne Kling, and Tom King... it was a great group.

That is a Who's Who list of local and professional historians.

Yes, definitely the historical side of it, which interested me a lot. I found it easy to get people in that vein, but also in the arts, too.

What did the Curriculum Committee do?

I remember having a committee and asking for suggestions. In some cases people would make the contacts and set up the classes.

One very important contact we made was at the August meeting when they asked me to outline the classes that were coming up for that fall. Somebody asked, "Could we have some Shakespeare classes?" Steven Tchudi was in the group that day. He was so involved

with Lifescapes and getting it started. He sat over there and spoke up and said, “Call Eric Rasmussen at the university.”

So that was an easy contact and a wonderful breakthrough. Eric has been extremely popular, and others in his department have taught classes since then. That was one thing I often told people when we’re going to follow up in curriculum—I found that people were so willing to come in and teach, lecture, read, or do whatever was required.

As far as the arts go, Larry Jacox has been doing the watercolor classes for twelve or thirteen years. It’s incredible and our good fortune.

Way back, we had a little lady named Zelma. There are some easels out here named in her memory, and she taught oil painting. That was way back in 1994 and 1995. She was quite elderly then. The story was that she died at her easel one day. It was a happy way for her to go, I guess.

We had Oriental brush painting. There was a woman that had lived in the Orient and had studied the art very seriously. In fact, that painting behind you is one of hers. She taught that here for quite a long time. It was very popular. The traditional way you hold a brush and apply the ink.... Then she moved away.

Quite a long time ago, they used to do a creative arts group that was just a matter of people bringing whatever they were working on—painting, sewing, knitting, or whatever little creative project they had going. People were encouraged to bring anything. I think it was a rather small group, and it died out later.

Were there certain topics for which it was difficult to get instructors?

I did it more from the approach of finding somebody available and then using

their expertise. I wanted to expand and make more topics available to the interest of many people. It was wide open; we just had religion, music, and Bridge lessons, and we tried science, literature, and history. That is the way it went—whatever and whoever was available.

Do repeat presenters like Eric Rasmussen give standard presentations or develop new ones?

I think it varies quite a bit with him. He did several Shakespeare plays for us and then he got into some other things more recently. He would also show portions of films of those plays, so it was a real variety. He really enjoyed these seniors as a group, because he could make jokes that we understood. [laughs] We understood a lot of the historical references.

Are there any classes that stand out in your mind as being more culturally related?

I would say the Oriental brush class was culturally related because she would also tell us little stories about how she learned the art, about some of her teachers and their culture. Many classes described other countries and peoples.

In designing a curriculum, what considerations do you have to take into account in terms of your membership?

I guess it has to be age-appropriate, but I really can’t think of any limitations there. Computers come to mind, because that’s something that most people our age didn’t grow up with and are interested in learning more about. I only mention that because it’s something that came along late in our lives, whereas all these other topics have existed since the beginning of time, so to speak.

Which classes have been the most popular?

History, literature, and medicine. It's hard to say. A long time ago we used to go out on what they called the Nevada Experience. We would visit the Supreme Court Building and the City Hall. Of course, those are all related to government and were very popular.

Are there people who basically are members of OLLI for very specific classes.

This is true, yes. The watercolor class and Cracker Barrel. Here are a thousand members and you get maybe fifty to seventy-five people in a large class, you wonder where are the rest of those members. So there are some that do only go to specific classes.

Can you tell me about the music-oriented classes?

There was a History of Music, during which the professor went through the development of music over the centuries. He was very good. There was also a series of video lectures, and at the same time art lectures that related to the same period of time as the music. In a certain historical period you were getting both the art and the music developed at that time.

We've had more modern music with Steve Anderson, who's done his jazz series. His were very good, with a more modern culture aspect. We've had special guests at the Tea and Symphony and also the music seminars. Those have been excellent. We had some of our finest musicians from the city and from the orchestras giving us demonstrations of their instruments—very entertaining and educational. Other times they've had musical groups, like the Christmas program.

Do you remember any classes that are literature oriented?

Anne Howard, who I think was an original member with Elder College, is an expert on Emily Dickinson. She did a series on her years ago, and she still does poetry readings. She knows literature. We've had several others from the university, like Ann Ronald, Aaron Santesso, and James Mardoch. It really made people appreciate certain literature a lot more than they had ever experienced in their school years. It just was a lot more fun. Of course, our attitudes are different, too, than twenty-year-olds.

Eric Rasmussen organized a trip to Ashland. He would be there to help critique. Not only did we hear it, but we experienced it too. Our classes have led us into lots of things that we wouldn't be exposed to otherwise, and lots of opportunities. Anne Howard still does classes in poetry and literature. It's a real variety, which I think people appreciate. It keeps up their interest.

We haven't talked about religions at all. There was a time... we haven't done much in recent times, but we did a series on religions, Jewish culture, and Islam. A long time ago, David Hettich did *The Bible as Literature*, and he was famous for that on campus. That was back in the days when you had to pay to go to that class, so that non-members could come too. That was in the early 1990s. It was a very popular class.

What kind of classes have been offered that relate to history?

Dick Davies comes to mind. He is also a history professor. I know he did a program on Truman once and on another president, and he was very good. There was a teacher from TMCC that I had come and talk about Basque history.

Then we did a trip to look at tree carvings. There have been lots of history classes.

One of the earliest classes I ever attended was with a couple who were members that had lived in Alaska. It was about their experiences there—frozen ground and primitive conditions. There was a couple that did a program on Russia. This was related to the science angle of it, too. He had worked with the oil companies in establishing pipelines out of Russia across some of the Eastern European countries. Also, it was about their experiences living in Russia—very interesting.

We did quite a bit about Nevada gold mining because we have a member that is a geologist. That is another example of somebody that's available, so you choose the class according to who you have that can give it. We also took a trip up to Carlin and Elko to the gold mines. Those trips are a real challenge to organize, so it's hard to get people to take on that responsibility.

We have done little trips. We went to the Nevada Museum of Art when the building was new. We did a tour of the Desert Research Institute and learned about cloud seeding, weather, and black holes in the cosmos. We did a tour of the Historical Society one summer.

Can you discuss the ups and downs of the growth of membership over the years and how it's affected the classes?

Certainly along with the increase in membership has been the increase in the numbers and varieties of classes. They've had excellent attendance at the board meetings. Also, they have couples attending the board meetings, which didn't used to happen. A lot more men attend classes too. I think the men like the Cracker Barrel especially.

An excellent Board was in charge when we made the connection with Osher, so it really grew. We had the money to publicize and just absolutely blossomed, so, of course, the numbers of classes did too.

The locations have helped, not only here on the second floor, but we've used Laxalt Auditorium a lot more, and also the Redfield campus.

Has the Curriculum Committee had any difficulties keeping up with the membership?

They have quite a large committee, I think. They're very good at working everybody. Everybody has new ideas and new contacts. That is what is important—to know who to contact.

How has the relationship with Extended Studies evolved over the years?

Excellent, as far as I can see. Shera Alberti-Annunzio really keeps us going in guiding us, especially in rules related to the university. There are limits to what we can and can't do. When we have parties or anything, her boss, Dee Henderson, often comes. Neal Ferguson did, too, years ago. I found them very good to work with, and I think they do a lot for us.

Are there any classes that you would like the Curriculum Committee to add, or maybe any classes that have gone by the wayside since you served on the committee?

One thing I really enjoyed years ago were the trips to the various government offices that we called the Nevada Experience. There is just so much offered, it's hard to keep up with it all. I haven't felt a need for something that hasn't been offered. I am very much interested in history and science. I was sorry that we

lost the Oriental brush painting classes, but I don't know that there's ever been any effort to replace her. I think she was unique in that department.

Have the classes being offered ever been influenced by who is on the Curriculum Committee?

Very much so. One example is the summer program. LaMerne Kozlowski is a dyed-in-the-wool Sparks person, and so we get more Sparks things, which is good. I'm sure the people on the committee bring in whatever interests them and what connections they have.

What kinds of changes have you seen in Reno in the last thirty-six years?

Increase in populations and changes in modernizing the streets. The joke is when you want to describe a certain location, the way to describe it is, "You know where so-and-so used to be." That is what people remember, some building that's been torn down. Well, an awful lot of people I don't know anymore. Even in OLLI, I look around and there are so many people I don't know, but that's good. We need change and we need a younger crowd coming in to keep it going. I think it is working very successfully.

What kinds of changes have you seen in Reno in terms of cultural organizations over the years?

Of course, Artown itself... what is it, twenty years? That is really phenomenal. The little theater groups have grown, and there are more of them, and Reno Little Theater is finally building their own building.

A change that should have happened was the Christian Science Church on First Street

and the Truckee river. It's a lovely old building, and it's too bad they're having such a hard time getting it off the ground. Something we haven't talked about at all is architecture, which we really haven't had anything in Elder College or OLLI about, although some historical talks mention it.

The Symphony I think has almost sold-out performances most of the time. Nevada Opera has struggled, but that's been true in any town. They haven't closed it down completely, so I guess they're still hanging on. The new building for the Nevada Museum of Art has been a wonderful addition. They've had some really good shows there. It has grown along with the community. I don't like it to get so big, but it has its advantages, too.

SHARON WALBRIDGE

Allison Tracy: *Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?*

Sharon Walbridge: I was actually born in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in November of 1939. My parents had married ten years earlier in 1929, which was not an auspicious year. One of the things they were doing in Cheyenne (they had married in Nebraska), was they were making a living by closing stores that had been affected by the Depression. So Wyoming was on the way. They came to Nevada with the Sewell family. As it turned out, when we came here in 1940 this became our home.

We stayed in, I remember, the Silver State Motor Lodge. It was a great big motor lodge on South Virginia, which is where we camped out until we found a house to rent. That was when we moved to St. Lawrence Street between Gordon and Arlington. That is really where I think I grew up.

The home had been owned by Judge Ballard, who was a well-known divorce lawyer. He was then a judge in Reno. I still know the girl who lived next door to me.

Her name was Carol Crowder. She is now married, so her name is Carol Baird. We are still in touch. We've known each other since we were two.

That tells you what kind of town Reno was in those days. It was obviously a small town. I don't know what the population was, but it was probably 25,000 people, *if* it was 25,000 people then. During the war, a lot of people came there because Stead Air Force Base opened, and Fallon, of course, was a naval base. Even though there were newcomers coming in, in Reno in those days if you said, "Where do you go to elementary school?" there were four elementary schools. It was a very telling statement. It put you either north of the river or south of the river. We were south of the river—I went to Mt. Rose Elementary.

We were also close enough to the river that once in a while my friends and I would just walk to the river or even ride down to Idlewild Park to go to the river. Our parents didn't know, of course, because we weren't supposed to do that. We would do that in

preference to playing in the irrigation ditches, though, which were very dangerous. My mother said to me, "If I ever hear of you being in the irrigation ditch, I'll skin you alive." That doesn't sound very good. [laughs] Many children died in the ditches until the PTA got together and had them fenced, not totally, but where the most kids were getting killed.

It was the kind of a place in those days where in the morning you could get on your bicycle and your mom would say (since sometimes we didn't take a lunch), "Be home by dusk." It was a safe town. I remember my brother was six years older than I was, and on Saturday it was his job as a guide to get a dime from my mother. We would walk downtown and go to the movie. It did go up to 25 cents, finally. We thought that was terrible. [laughs]

We would swim at the swimming pool over by the lakes at Idlewild. The thing about swimming at Idlewild was that they would drain the pool every night and then they would fill it with fresh river water every morning—believe me, that was cold. I don't know when they put in water filters, but when I was a kid they didn't have them. We would also go to Idlewild in the winter to ice skate. My now deceased husband used to always kid me about how it was colder and there was more snow in the old days, but there really was. The ponds would freeze and we skated on them.

One of the things that I particularly enjoyed about Reno in those days is belonging to the Brownie Scouts and then the Girls Scouts, and camping up at Lake Tahoe in the summer.

I really love the Reno Junior Ski Program. I think we maybe were in the first year. Marcy Hurst started it up. That was a big thing. We would all go down to the Virginia Street Bridge with our skis and wait for the buses to come. The coldest place you could wait in

Reno for anything was on the Virginia Street Bridge. The wind would always come down the river, and it was just a freezing experience. [laughs] You climbed on the bus and played "Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall." The bus drivers must have been going nuts by the time we finally got to Sky Tavern. It was good, clean fun, though, and that's how I learned to ski. I skied all my life. So that was wonderful. The skills I gained at the Girl Scout camp I used all my life too.

I went from Mt. Rose Elementary to B.D. Billingshurst Junior High, which was at the time over on Plumas, close to where Our Lady of the Snows School is now. B.D. Billingshurst had at one time been the superintendent of public instruction here. I guess he was nationally known for some of his progressive ideas.

Then I had the privilege of going to Reno High School. The principal was David Finch. He was an outstanding educator. There are those of us who run into each other periodically and say, "weren't we lucky to have David Finch?" They had a good faculty and we learned a lot.

In those days, the rural schools were not comparable to Reno High. I didn't know this until I came back to Nevada after being gone for thirty-six years: students who got As and Bs at Reno High, when they went to a university, would be admitted at a different level. I never understood why I was taking all those 201 courses. Somebody told me to sign up for that, and I had never been to school. I was the first university applicant in my family. I really had a good foundation at Reno High. I made my grades the first semester at the university and played around the second semester. [laughs] I didn't get bad grades, but I didn't get really great grades. I graduated from the university in three years and went on to my adult life.

While you were growing up in Reno, do you remember any arts programs in the schools?

I remember the librarian used to come to school—the children’s librarian at the Washoe County Library. Her name was Marianne McGahan and she had programs and she would read. Then we would do drama. I remember at Mt. Rose we would have dramatic...our gym had a stage and we would do productions there.

I don’t know if this happened at other elementary schools, but some of the parents at Mt. Rose had connections to the entertainment industry. I remember one time the Sons of the Pioneers came and performed for us. We were able to have professional entertainment as well as the entertainment we created on our own.

We had several talented art students in our class. There was no specific art teacher, but the teachers did teach art.

Can you tell me about performing at Reno Little Theater as a child?

Yes, we did that. Carol Crowder and Patsy Plumn, another girl from Mt. Rose, and I were in a play. I don’t remember the name of the play, but we performed at Reno Little Theater.

Reno Little Theater has been a cultural mark in this community. It is still here. It is still doing its thing. In those days, it had its own theater up on North Sierra Street, in what had one time been the Danish church. It was a nice little red brick facility. It was really very nice for a community of our size to have a dedicated space for theater.

Do you remember anything else that was happening culturally at that time?

Well, at least in our life, my brother was an extremely musical person. He took

piano lessons with a man whose name was Vasasheen, who was a White Russian. He had escaped from Russia, coming from eastern Russia over to western Russia and across the Pacific Ocean. He was a very talented musician and he had a cadre of students, some of whom are still here and alive. There would always be performances. At the 20th Century Club there would be recitals.

The schools had bands, so there were music programs, particularly at the high school level. I believe Billingshurst too....

I didn’t understand this until I was an adult, but Reno had a vast amount of very talented, creative people because of the entertainment industry. Those people would come into the schools. I really thought that people all over the country would get Liberace to come to their school and play. I didn’t know that Liberace wouldn’t do that in every town he performed in. The Rat Pack...those guys were here. I remember the Kingston Trio came to my sorority one evening.

That spread out, and then the Philharmonic...I don’t know whether they called it the Philharmonic, but those people who were here playing in the bands that supported the performances together with the people from the university.... We just had a tremendous amount of music and culture here.

What did you major in at UNR?

I majored in social psychology. I have to be perfectly honest; I had a good freshman year. Peculiarly enough, during the first semester of my sophomore year, there was a Korean vet who had finished all of his engineering courses and was taking twenty-one units of what he called hearts and flowers. We had three classes together. He also substituted for the house boys at my sorority house. This

man ultimately became my husband. So, in my sophomore year I was courting. He graduated in that winter. We then decided to get married, so I went to school from the start of my sophomore year until the end of my junior year, and I graduated in three years.

I really didn't have time for much because I also had two jobs, although I did ski on the ski team. It was called the Powder Puff Derby. We didn't get any help from the university. When the university would host the tournaments here (it wasn't called the Western Athletic Conference), up at Slide Mountain, they would have the tournaments at Sky Tavern.

The girls had four to six kids who were pretty good skiers. The mothers made a little top so that we all had the same top, and that was called the Powder Puff Derby. They did help us with the lift tickets, though. We only had to pay five dollars every time we went, whereas the boys got to go free. When they wanted help grooming the runs, they looked for the girls to do it. Title IX was not even in anybody's dreams.

Why did you leave Reno?

It was love. My husband had graduated in the winter of 1959. He was an engineer. He got a job in Sacramento. By the way, Interstate 80 did not exist then either; they were building it. He was driving back and forth.

So in June of 1960 we married, and we moved to Sacramento. We lived there for twenty-two years. He ultimately became the chief executive officer of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and a very prominent player in the national public utilities scene.

So that's why I left Reno, but we would have stayed. We tried to come back, but jobs

for people in electrical engineering...when he went to Sierra Pacific, for example, and he was looking for a job there because he had done some internships. They said, "We already hired our Nevada student." Their *one* Nevada student. Civil engineers are different. They could work on the roads. So, yes, that is why. We were gone for thirty-six years and always wanted to come back here. He was a fourth-generation Californian. He didn't want to go back to California.

What ultimately brought you back to Reno and when was that?

We left Sacramento in 1982 and moved to Florida, where he became the chief executive officer of a large bi-state electric utility. He worked there twelve years. While Florida was a very congenial environment and very good to us, we both kept thinking about the mountains. I've always told people you can take the girl out of the mountains, but you can't take the mountains out of the girl. Apparently that was true with my husband too. We retired and returned in 1996, and here we are.

Was there anything that surprised you about Reno when you moved back?

Not really. My mother was still alive all this time, so we were going back and forth. My brother had, unfortunately, died prematurely. I was the only person, so I came back and forth quite often.

The difference, I would say, in moving back was a much more diverse population. I think we lost a certain sense of community with all of the new people who came. An awful lot of them had come here to retire, partly because of the tax structure, so they had no knowledge of downtown. That is unfortunate.

I remember one day my sister-in-law was out from Chicago and we were down walking along the Truckee River. We ran into some people and they looked lost. I asked them if I could help them and they said, "Well..."

I said, "Are you visitors?"

The guy said, "No, no, no. I've lived here for twenty years."

I said, "Then you must know what you want to do."

He said, "Well, actually, it is the first time I've ever been downtown."

We were standing on the Arlington Street bridge and he said, "I was wondering if there is any place decent that we could get lunch."

I said, "Well, the Nevada Museum of Art is right over here. They have a nice place to have lunch there. If you don't want to eat in the museum, you just go walk a little further and you could be on California Avenue. There are many places to eat there. Or over on Sierra there is Peg's Ham and Eggs. That is a local hangout that is good. You don't have to go to a casino to eat if you don't want to."

He said, "Really? There is an art museum in Reno?"

I said, "Yes, there is a very distinguished art museum. As a matter of fact, it is the only art museum in the state of Nevada."

He said, "Well, is there anything else to do downtown?"

I said, "Well, there are interesting walks along the river. You're in the Historic District. You could walk around down here and just look around. Behind you is St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral. That is the oldest Catholic cathedral in the state of Nevada."

They turned around and looked and said, "Oh," as if they didn't know we had churches here. Then I encouraged them to walk over on to the Old Post Office and admire that building, take a look at the Pioneer Center, where we have all of our performing arts, and

maybe walk into the courthouse because it is a historic courthouse.

This man just looked at me and he said, "Gee, I just hadn't any idea all of this was down here."

I said, "Where do you live?"

He said, "Out in the North Valleys."

I said, "Well, maybe you would like to come in more often." [laughs]

Were there any other really significant changes besides the population growth that you saw?

There was a humongous change. When I was a youngster and even clear through university, Reno had a downtown—a bona fide downtown. As a matter of fact, I was talking with some people just the day before yesterday about what a neat downtown it was. There were wonderful stores. There was a building called the Arcade that had a cavernous cover over it and you could walk in. There was Joseph Magnin's. We had Lerner's. We had very nice stores. There were men's and women's stores. The AP had an office upstairs in the Arcade.

Between First and Second Street on Virginia Street was really a shopping district. Also the movie theaters were on First Street, and then there was one up on Second or Third. This is where people went. Like the Waldorf. Not the Little Waldorf, which is the little college bar, but the big Waldorf, which was a place in downtown Reno. It had good food and was a kind of place where people would want to gather maybe for lunch or after-dinner drinks.

I was saddened to see that that had been destroyed really by the advent of the malls. All of the business that had been downtown then moved out to the malls. Downtown, unfortunately, was left to dreadful neglect.

Then I think Reno probably made a mistake. This happened while I was gone. They used to have a redline district where the gaming would be located. When they eased that, it made way for gaming to move out into other areas of downtown. As the malls took businesses out, these little casinos and bars moved in. I don't think it improved the caliber of downtown one bit. I think we're still suffering from that.

Mary Cashalis just day before yesterday wanted to have some sort of a look at whether we could do something about all of the tattoo parlors and liquor stores that are downtown. It did not look like that at all when I was a youngster.

The Masonic Building was there, and there were a lot of social clubs. The Masons, the Odd Fellows, the 20th Century Club—those were all downtown. The Masonic Building is still there and it has a theater that has been used. I don't know how old the Masonic Building is, but that was a main theater for local performances.

Can you tell me about your involvement in HRPS?

Historic Reno Preservation Society. Bill and I both were. When we came back, we had been gone for thirty-six years. That's a long time. A lot happens. He was reading the paper one day and said, "Oh, somebody named Pat Klos is going to lead a historic walking tour along the river. Let's go down and do that."

Well, Pat Klos is a person that I have known all my life as Pat Reynolds. She was born and raised here. She married one of Bill's fraternity brothers. They subsequently divorced, but she was always here. She was a teacher and she was interested in trying to do preservation. Reno had tried this more this once and it hadn't taken. When the Mapes

Hotel went down, though, that was a big catalyst.

We went down and met at the McKinley Park School. Gosh, there were so many people there who we had gone to university with. They were there and just a whole bunch of people, like Kay Hicks.

They had already formed HRPS. They had gotten together at My Favorite Muffin about a week or ten days before that and decided that they were going to have an organization. Well, Bill and I joined, standing on the street. We are members number 39. He subsequently became the treasurer of HRPS, which was interesting because there were no funds to begin with.

After much prodding by Pat Reynolds-Klos, I said I would become the editor of the newsletter, which didn't have a name at the time. The newsletter has grown from what had been put out by Pat and one of her colleagues at McQueen High School—a one page mail-out. It is now in its thirteenth year, I think. It is known as a quarterly and it is published four times a year. It is collected by Special Collections and at the Archives at state of Nevada. It has come a long ways, baby.

I started out trying to just send out meeting notices out and things like that. It was interesting how many people wanted to help preserve the stories, because every time one of these old-timers dies, they take some tremendous stories with them. So in addition to just sitting in a building doing research, we tried to talk to the old-timers and we tried to get their stories on paper.

HRPS has grown. In 1996 or 1997, we were member number 39. I think there are nearly a thousand members now. So, you see, people really do care. Obviously those are not all old-Reno people, because so many of the old-Reno people are gone. We are delighted to know that there are newcomers who want to participate.

One of the most successful things HRPS does is walking tours through historic neighborhoods. This has been incredibly successful. People who own the houses in neighborhoods where we have walked have been so interested to see that we are walking forty to sixty people through a neighborhood, they will come out and talk to us about their house. Some have even been so generous as to invite the whole group, if you can imagine that, to come into their house.

So that is one of the focuses that we have in HRPS. There is very little to preserve downtown because one of the things Reno did as it grew was, if a building was empty, they would knock it down and put something in it. This focus on neighborhood preservation...believe me, I think that is incredibly important.

I was recently in Sacramento for a funeral of an old friend. The church was in midtown Sacramento, and I hadn't been there in many years. They have rehabilitated a part of Sacramento near Sutter General Hospital that had become really kind of grungy. I was so impressed with it. I can see that kind of gentrification, if you will, take place in Reno. You can walk downtown to the business district, you can walk to the courts, and you can walk to the City Council. The County Commission is out on Ninth Street.

I think that if we preserve our neighborhoods and make them attractive, people will come because the arts are down there. Look at Artown. Artown is fabulous. I go to the Philharmonic and always have season tickets. I enjoy that very much. Bill and I enjoyed the Broadway Series until he became too ill to go. Reno is still a small town. We have a tremendous cultural wealth here.

What is the mission of HRPS, and what does it hope to accomplish through its work?

[reading] "We are dedicated to preserving and promoting historic resources in the Truckee Meadows through education, advocacy, and leadership." Originally when we wrote this, we did not use the term "Truckee Meadows". We said "in Reno", but we realized that the old ranches were part of what Reno was, and so we enlarged it to say Truckee Meadows.

I have a friend who is wintering in the desert right now down by Death Valley. One of our dreamy projects would be to lay out a map of where all the old ranches were, and then try to do an infill of how the community grew. If you've ever driven around much you see private streets that are little narrow streets and say "Private, Do Not Enter." Well, those were old ranches. You go back in there and a lot of people have built houses. Those private streets are just part of an old ranch, and it's fun to see it.

The other thing is tracing where the irrigation ditches go. This is a high mountain desert, and without the water—without the foresight of the people putting in the ditches—this would not be the way it is now.

I think that we have that with HRPS. We try to preserve what is left. Of course, the university district is very critical to that.

Our education programs, like the walking tours, and our monthly meetings during the school year...we bring in speakers who address the whole issue of education and what is going on in our area in terms of what needs to be saved.

Last fall we had a historic home tour that was our first venture at this. There were six historic homes that were available. It was a self-guided tour, for which you bought tickets. I think more than five hundred people did that. I'm going to give a plug to Public Broadcasting. They were announcing the fact that this was happening. People who heard it who listened

to NPR were coming from Tahoe and Truckee, because they were interested in seeing this.

We were just really blessed because the preceding night before the tour we had a gathering at what is now the Garden Shop down on Mayberry and McCarren, which is a historic home. That was the Caughlin Ranch house. We had a wonderful evening there with lots and lots of people. It was catered and there were beverages.

The next day the tour started, and, by golly, we were really blessed. Somebody was shining down on us because by the time I got to my last house, you could see the storm coming over the Sierra. It started to rain, but all the houses had been visited. We had had our night before and it was a beautiful, balmy night. Somebody was smiling on HRPS.

Which six homes were part of the tour?

The Upson/Arrizabalaga home on Jones Street. Joan Arrizabalaga is the owner of it. It was built in 1902 and is in the Powning Addition.

HRPS has done a total historic survey of the Powning Addition. It is now the first national conservation project in the state of Nevada. Rather than calling it just a historic district, it is now a conservation district. You can see the street signs designating that, and there will soon be a rock structure, designating it as a conservation district.

There was the Patrick Ranch House, which is over on Gordon and owned by Lyndi Cooper-Schroeder and Judge Jack Schroeder. It's the old ranch house built in 1901 on 160-acre parcel of historic land, part of the Arlington Ranch and Nursery. They have done a great job of keeping the original house very original.

You may or may not be familiar with the house that Bill Harrah built in that area. It is

just around the corner, this great big mansion that Bill Harrah built. There are all these other nice homes in that area, and here is the old ranch house. You look and you think this is 160 acres, which is what you could get for free in those days. This is all open space. It is a neat thing is to think this is all open space.

We went across Virginia over to the east part of Reno to 360 Moran Street, which is called the Full Circle House. It was a sheep rancher's—Sanford Wells—home. It was built in 1900, and was granted permission to subdivide the property in 1905. One of the things that is neat, is it is a Queen Anne house. It was probably built by the Nevada Portable House Company.

Those homes are much more modest than the first two that we saw. There is now an active effort, in the Wells Avenue neighborhood, to preserve those homes and that neighborhood. That is one of our neighborhood projects. HRPS will give money to that. I think they have a good shot at stabilizing the neighborhood. A lot of those homes are still owned by the original families.

We then came back across town to the Hart House, which is on Monroe Court. The Hart House is an exotic revival pagoda-style home on two-thirds of an acre on what was the Patrick Ranch land in the early part of the twentieth century. The home was designed by the up-and-coming young architect Russell Mills, Sr., who had worked for Reno's preeminent architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. This house is tucked back. It is on one of those side streets, so you have to have permission to go back there. You get back there and here is this exotic Asian-looking house. It is just really an interesting home. It is owned by Shirlee and Larry Hull. They were very generous to allow us to come in there.

We finally went to the home of Abner Sewell on 1280 Monroe Street, which is in the

old southwest part of Reno. I mentioned that my father came to work for the Sewell family. They first started a grocery store in Tuscarora, Nevada. Tuscarora is way out in the eastern part of the state. Well, Herb and his brothers built quite a grocery empire, and this was the home of Abner and Nettie Sewell. They had several children. They had constructed this home to their desire. It was very nostalgic for me to be in that home.

If people want to know about what Reno was like, they can do [these home tours]. We'll probably do this again. One of the things that I would like to see in terms of some history of our cultural institutions...the Reno Little Theater is moving into a new space now, and I think it would be interesting for HRPS to do a story on the history of Reno Little Theater. I am no longer the editor, so it's not up to me to decide that, but I think that would be an interesting story.

Who comprises the membership of HRPS?

It is not a group of elites, although there are some people who you might consider elite. They're just people who love place. A great sense of place is part of what HRPS is about. That is one reason why this tour was so successful— people are trying to understand what it means to live in Reno and what the history of Reno means to them as a resident.

For example, Patty Cafferata is a member of HRPS. She is a former treasurer of the state of Nevada and a fairly well-known gal, but she just does her stuff for HRPS when we ask her to do it. Since she has quit running around the state being an attorney general, she is writing an article that appears in the *Gazette-Journal* based on historical interest.

The membership is fairly diverse between males and females. I personally would like to see some younger folks come into HRPS

because they need to know some of this. Younger people, though, are so tied up with their own lives. There are many people from the university who participate with us. I would just say run-of-the-mill, walking-around, ordinary people with an interest in where they live and people who are committed to seeing that we preserve the quality of life in our community.

How is the membership of HRPS involved in the organization?

One of the things I have to tell you is that my husband was very ill, and he died three years ago, so I haven't been actively involved in HRPS for probably five years now; however, we had a legal history of the Truckee River given by Bill Isaef, who is an attorney who dealt with that for years. I don't know if many people understand it. I have always been a water buff because I grew up here. When I lived in Sacramento I was active in the League of Women Voters and studied water issues.

The Truckee River is the most litigated river in the world. You can understand because it is the major supply of water for the city of Reno and for the Paiute Indian Reservation. It starts up in the mountains, so it is bi-state. The drainage is from Nevada and California, and goes into Lake Tahoe. It runs out of Tahoe at the California side at what we call Fanny Bridge. It is called Fanny Bridge because everybody's fanny is up in the air while they look over the bridge. Then it comes down to California and it finally gets into Nevada. The upstream storage is mostly in California.

So you have two states, multiple counties, and the city of Reno. Of course, Sierra Pacific Power had power houses along the river. There used to be sawmills along the river which degraded the river. The Paiutes, whose

life depended on it, and the people then who stole the water.... Senator Newlands, in his wisdom, decided we were going to make the desert bloom out by Fallon. Anyway, you could spend years talking about the Truckee River.

Most recently, Jack Harpster's talked about the hundred years in the Nevada Governor's Mansion, which is interesting. Not just the story of the Governor's Mansion, but the people who lived there and what it meant. We will have the story of the Lincoln Highway. The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway in the United States, and it goes right through Reno. We also get together with the Film Society and we do a film night. There are a whole lot of different things that goes on in addition to the walking tours.

Does HRPS have any committees or structure?

Yes. Of course there is a board of directors. We have a beautiful website; Rosie Cevasco is the webmaster. We have a program committee. We have a membership director. Of course, we have a walking tour chair. We have an administrator now because it became more than a volunteer could do. Cindy Ainsworth is not a full-time administrator, but she does fill that position. We have the *FootPrints* managing editor and editorial staff. There are many people involved in many ways at every level.

Where has HRPS met over the years?

Our monthly meetings are at Mt. Rose Elementary, and I just have to say thank you, because Mt. Rose is big in my heart. Mamie Towles was the principal when I attended Mt. Rose. There is a school named for Mamie Towles now in the north area. Mt. Rose is

one of what was called the four sisters. There were four schools built in the mission style in Reno. There are two that now survive. One is McKinley Arts, which is where the Arts and Culture Center is for the city of Reno. Christine Fey is the director down there. The people whose kids were going to Mt. Rose (this happened while I was gone), came together and actually saved it. It was destined to be destroyed because it was "old".

Well, they refurbished it. That school is in service today and it will continue in service. I don't think anybody is going to let that school go anywhere. That is where we meet, and it is very appropriate because it is an old place.

We do have some meetings at McKinley Arts. We have a dinner meeting, and we started having it at McKinley Arts. It is now so big, we have to have it in a public facility. At least those schools were saved, and they were very important to the life of the community.

In what ways does HRPS reach out to the community and involve them in activities related to the historic preservation of Reno?

Most of that is done through advertising in the newspaper and news stories that we're able to get the *RGJ* to run for us. The information comes over in National Public Radio or PBS. The PBS does that because of some contributions that members make in their fundraising drive. If a certain amount is received, then they will make public service announcements.

It is not a surprise that Sharon Honig-Bear, who is the current president of HRPS, said to me last fall when we had the home tour that once the announcements were being made on PBS, the reservations for the tour just skyrocketed. That demographic is part of the kind of people who would be interested in what we're doing.

Can you tell me about the walking tours that HRPS sponsors?

Originally the walking tours would start at McKinley Arts and go down along the river and through what we call the Powning District. C.C. Powning came here as a young man, probably just little more than a boy, and was a real go-getter. That area that is now called the Powning District was subdivided by C.C. Powning. Across the street from the courthouse is a park that's called Powning Park. That would be an area for a walk.

The area which is along California Avenue where the mansions—we call them mansions—are, is a very popular walk. We also do a walk through the old southwest district—Nixon, Manor Drive, Circle Drive, LaRue, and that area.

Last year we started a new walk that was very well attended at the Nevada mental health facility, which is out near Coney Island. Two of our members, Rosie Cevasco and Kim Hendricks, spent a great deal of time researching that whole facility and found some interesting things. Some of the buildings were designed by Frederic DeLongchamps, who was the preeminent architect in northern Nevada during his career. Unfortunately, they also threw in some sixties-style buildings which were nothing more than rectangular blocks. The old buildings look a whole lot better.

We have done such things such as taking bus tours of the Donner Trail. We called it Trailing the Donner Party. The first one I was on was just delightful because Frank Mullen from the *RGJ* had written a book about it and served as our tour guide. We met at the Auto Museum and then went over to Lockwood to. We trailed the Donner Trail and through the Truckee Meadows.

There are still places out in the east part of the town where you can still see wagon tracks

in the dirt. We tried to set aside some of that, but homebuilders aren't very excited about saving wagon tracks in the dirt.

That was an all-day thing. We had lunch, and we ended up in Dog Valley where Tamsen Donner was thought to have died. We've done that trip more than once.

We not only walk people; we will bus them around. We have a bicycle tour that we put people on. It usually starts at My Favorite Muffin and goes around town looking at different parts of Reno. The thing that's fun about it—the next thing you know, maybe we'll have roller blades—is that it was pretty eclectic.

Another tour that we did on a bus tour was the WPA Project—Works Progress Administration projects from the Depression era. There are many of those in Reno. One that you're probably familiar with is that wall along University Terrace. Of course, Virginia Lake is a WPA Project. You drive around and you see these things and say, "Oh, now I get it." There is a lot of diversity in our tours.

Have you seen any changes in the popularity of the tours over the years?

Oh, lots of growth. When we started out, that first walk that Pat did maybe had ten people. Now there are so many, we have to have people make reservations. You could show up with one tour guide and there would be a hundred people. That is not manageable. The thing that we all have to consider is whether it is manageable and is it safe, and can the people hear what the guide is saying? So this has grown in leaps and bounds.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the newsletter?

When we started, there was me, and I didn't know anything about typesetting. We

had a graphic artist and he had a “helper”. These two kids were doing this on a wing and a prayer. I remember I took them to lunch at The Gold ‘N Silver and we were talking about how we would do this and what we would do. We said, “What will we call it?”

We bandied around some ideas, and I said, “Well, I kind of like the idea of footprints through time.” It was his idea to do the spelling the way it is, which has been a mixed blessing. It is F-o-o-t and then a capital P-r-i-n-t-s, and a lot of people forget that it is a capital P in the middle of the word. Loren John is the person who designed the logo. He is a local artist.

I have a friend who grew up here with me and went from Mt. Rose clear through the university with me. She is a professional designer. She lives in New York. Her dad, by the way, was George Gadda, who taught shop at Billingshurst Junior High his whole life. She is the person who came up with the design of the HRPS blocks at top.

It was a collective stumbling-along and we refined it over a period of time. I think *FootPrints* is a good name. What we are trying to do is walk in the footprints of those who came before. It was just one of those things that evolved very slowly.

Looking through some of the past newsletters, you have different writers who write very detailed and researched articles about different areas around Reno. Do people offer to write something or do you pick themes for newsletters?

When I was editor, as I got more experience with it and we were doing programming at Mt. Rose, we decided that it might be very beneficial if we could tie these things together. Now, we didn’t tie them tightly, because that just wasn’t going to work. Yes, though, we would try to get these things together.

We have had a lot of different people who have written for us. Debbie Hinman, who is on the editorial board right now, does some beautiful stories for us. Kim Henrick does some good stuff for us. I personally tried to bring a lot of diversity in the voices, which is a challenge if you are an editor—I’m not trained to be an editor—because I wanted to retain the voice of that author. People would say, “Oh, my gosh. Did you see how they did that?”

I said, “Yes, but that is how they did it.” We’re not a newspaper, you know. We were a newsletter.

We have many people who write for us. Increasingly, I think as the publication has gained stature in the community, there are more people from the university who are willing to write for us. I can see that they would not have wanted to jump on the bandwagon right away. Yes, we have a lot of people who do that.

One of the things that I would like to mention is that we do have a publication that we sell at Sundance. It is called *The Walk Through Time*, and it is about the Powning District. I mentioned that we did *Trailing the Donners*. We had a publication for that. That is a first-class publication.

It’s beautiful.

We have had parties. Newer people probably wouldn’t know this, but the El Cortez Hotel is an old-time hotel down there by the St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral. We had a period party down there one time. People came in costumes and that was a lot of fun. That was a long time ago. That was in 2000.

We’ve gone to the rural schools. We have talked about the divorce trade. We have done stories on the floods. Oh, lord, we have

plenty of flood stories. So we haven't rest on our laurels. C. Elizabeth Raymond, who is from the university, came and talked to us about George Wingfield. She was very knowledgeable on that.

One of the things I found particularly interesting, and so did my husband, was ice harvesting on the Truckee at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. We take electricity so for granted, but we didn't have any way to store things and keep them cold. Reno, because of the railroad, was a place where a lot of livestock and produce came to sit and had to be preserved. The ice harvesting took place up near Boca and places like that and was brought down here. With the logging going on, the ice was preserved with sawdust. It takes you back, and it is not that long ago; it was a hundred years ago, you know.

We did the V&T [Virginia and Truckee Railroad]. You may or may not remember when the V&T was running through town, but it ran down Holcomb. The right-of-way is still there. When I was a kid, the tracks were still there. They probably wish they had never gotten rid of it.

Has HRPS partnered with any local or state organizations like the Historic Resources Commission?

We have had some connections with HRC, but not a great deal.

How would you describe the relationship between HRPS, being a local membership-driven organization, and state and local offices?

We have had support from the SHPO, State Historic Preservation Office. It has been moral support more than anything, because

they are really not in much of a position to do more than moral support. That goes both ways, though, because when the SHPO is trying to find out if there are sites that should be designated, we will help with that. We will help with submitting an application.

We are going to have to look at ways in which we can all live together closely, because there will be no money for this sort of thing. Unfortunately, SHPO had a meeting in Reno not too long ago. It was just a horrible, stormy night, and there were only three people that got there. They were looking for sites for designation. That could be a good subject to work on— collaboration.

What else can you tell me about the value of historic preservation?

I belong to the National Preservation Organization. They taught historic tourism, but I think the towns that they have found... the communities that have preserved elements of their past seem to thrive better than those that just keep tearing down and starting from scratch all the time.

We are a young country, and I think that we always had a lot of land in our country. I don't think that is true anymore. Really, I mean, that sounds dumb. We're still the same country coast to coast, but the population is much larger than it used to be. We're not nearly as optimistic as we were. People are searching for understanding about where we were, where we've come from, and why we are where we are right now. The only way we can understand that is historically.

Nevada currently is in a dreadful economic situation. I've talked passionately, frankly... These conversations are not at all dispassionate about economics and what is going to happen, and the enormous number of cuts

that are taking place in the state and local governments. We keep saying how did we get here? Aside from the fact that we have had a nationwide, if not worldwide, economic downturn, the greatest since the Great Depression...in Nevada, we have this peculiar thing where we believe other people should pay taxes for us.

Those of us who love this state want better for it. We don't want to shut down our public schools. We don't want to divide our university to the point where it is nonfunctional. We don't want to be at the bottom of all the lists in the United States. I am ashamed of that, and so are the people that I grew up with. There are a lot of people who are new here who are ashamed of that.

What is the solution to that? What is the historic basis of it? The historic basis of it is that during the days coming out of the Great Depression, Nevada had the divorce trade. Then the eastern press came to Nevada and wrote very disparagingly about what was going on in Nevada. At that time, it was primarily in Reno. This negative viewpoint about what was going on in Nevada took place, and so then it continued.

The people who were able to get through Prohibition by selling at that time—imagine, alcohol was illegal—and do other things, and then got into the gambling. Those people in this state made a lot of money, and they didn't want to pay to take care of the regular walking-around people. That tradition survives to this day, unfortunately.

We have to take a look at that historically and say we're not the state that we were in 1929. We're not the state we were in 1949. We're not the state we were in 1999. This is the twenty-first century, and we must ask, what do we want to be in the twenty-first century?

I don't want to get on a soapbox, but I read an article in the paper the other day where

someone downtown said, "Look, the only thing that we have that Oregon and California don't have is 24/7 liquor."

I thought that that person knows nothing of everything I've said today here. He probably lives downtown and he probably has businesses downtown, but he has probably never been to the Nevada Museum of Art. He's probably never been to the Pioneer Center. He has probably never been on campus at the university. He is just looking at the lowest common denominator. Until the people in this community and in this state stop thinking of Nevada and Reno as the lowest common denominator, we'll always be in trouble.

I don't think we know how to go forward unless we know where we've been. I don't think we know how to go forward unless we know *who* we've been. That is very important. I think that, yes, we are all the things that outsiders think of us. We have legalized prostitution. Personally, I think it's better to legalize it and have it medically regulated. Prostitution is always going to go on. It always has and it always will. I think you might as well make sure it is as healthy as can be.

Yes, you can get divorces. Gosh, people get divorces in other states too. We were a leader, when you think about it. Other states have copied all the things we have done, with the exception of legalizing prostitution. Gambling, of course, is worldwide now.

It is incumbent upon us to look at that, and then look around and say, "look what has happened around the world. Who are the biggest owners of casinos in the Far East? The guys in Las Vegas. They don't need to make all their money in Nevada anymore." Maybe we can convince them they would like to pay a little more in taxes. I doubt it. I think that we need to look at our infrastructure, though. What it is we are going to pass on to succeeding generations, and how do we take

care of what we have? This is a very beautiful state. It is not a wasteland.

I just heard Michon Mackedon the other day. She is a native of Fallon, professor emeritus from Western Nevada College who has written a book on atomic testing in Nevada. This is one of the problems we suffer in our state—most of the big-time decisions are made in the East from an easterner's perspective. They think Nevada is a wasteland and that you could get rid of us and nobody would notice. I think it is incumbent upon us to stand up, be counted, and let people know that maybe they have the wrong perception.

Are there other areas in Reno besides the Powling Addition that HRPS has worked on?

Yes, we're working on the Wells Avenue area right now. There has been a great deal of interest, I understand, expressed from the area around Plumas. There are lots of old Reno people along in there. That was the Mt. Rose and B.D. Billingshurst area, and there are some nice homes in there.

Paul Revere Williams, who was the designer of the Church of Christ Scientists, which is down on the river, also built some little houses that were manufactured metal houses. They are scattered around that neighborhood. They had been in an auto court or something like that. I don't remember the story. There are things in those areas that they are interested in making a conservation district out of.

The house that I moved to when I was a sophomore in high school, which is in what is now called the Old Northwest, is well over fifty years old. That is what it takes to designate an area— fifty years. That's up by the university at Rancho San Rafael.

I'll never forget when we bought that house up there. People really got on our case

because what were we doing was destroying the desert. Those people aren't here anymore, but if they knew how far houses go now... [laughs] I think that's the story, though.

The other thing is that a lot of people don't realize that Wilbur May was the owner of Rancho and that he was from the May Company. There are lots of good stories.

Were you ever involved in the Historic Preservation Week?

Of course, *FootPrints* always had part of that. It is in conjunction with the national program. I think it's always in May—Historic Preservation Week. It is a nationwide thing and we try to do our part.

There was a woman who worked at the SHPO whose name is Mella Harmon. She no longer is there; she is with a private firm now. She always had us on our toes for things like that when she was at SHPO. Mella is a marvelous resource for historic preservation.

Were there any specific programs that HRPS put on for the week?

We did tours and may have had something specific in our program for Preservation Week.

Are there ways that HRPS works with the university in general or with specific university people?

I think that the university people that have come to us have come as members. Then, as we have been developing programs, we have been reaching out.

The university—you're probably more familiar with this than I am—has an ethic of volunteerism. They're very cooperative with that. Of course, they're experts. I

think it is fun to use the layperson and the professional expert and to combine them in your presentations and in your publications.

George Wingfield has long been a person of interest in the state of Nevada, but Elizabeth Raymond knows a whole lot more about him than most of the rest of us who just know scuttlebutt. So it is fun to have both.

Have you seen any broad changes in the organization?

I have. When we first started, it was essentially a group of people who were born and raised in Reno. There are now other people who have come on board who take a broader view than what we did. I think that is appropriate because as you age, you have to change and grow.

I personally would like to see the newsletter return a little bit more to a newsletter format. The things that we do and the meetings that we have are history too, and we can't forget that. That is how we built the organization. Just to do research articles is a little bit of a mistake, although they are very good, thoroughly researched, and well edited. I just think some of the things we do should be remembered. As Patty Cafferata said to me one day, we're part of the history too—what we're doing. I think that's true.

It would be fun, as we mature...there are communities along the Lincoln Highway, I guess you could say. Fallon has a quite a historical society, and Eureka has...if we could somehow one day do a statewide program along the old Pioneer Trail, I think that would be interesting.

I was really sad that the Shoe Tree got cut down. I have never understood vandalism and I never will. As the state continues to grow, maybe we need to expose more people to some of the historically valuable things. It

would be interesting maybe to do something from Reno from the state line, over to Elko, to over by Utah by Landover. That might be something we could do. Don't tell anybody I said that. I don't want to chair that committee. [laughs]

In your opinion, what are some of the major accomplishments of HRPS?

I think increasingly the awareness of the fact that we even exist. We've grown to nearly a thousand members in thirteen years. That is a major accomplishment. The designation of the Powning District as a conservation district is a major accomplishment. We wanted to make it historic district, but many of the old-timers there were just resistant to that. They thought, "I don't want anybody telling me what to do." That is not what happens when you become a historic district, but that misinformation still exists. We didn't let that hold us up. We found a way to go around it and still designate the area. I think that that helps.

We have just educated an enormous number of people on a very broad range of issues not just in the Truckee Meadows, like the Donner party. We recently had a talk at the meeting on how the Catholic church, St. Mary's of the Mountains, was saved from collapse and destruction. That is part of our purview. That is part of our historic area—Virginia City. As a matter of fact, we were just up there the other night as an organization for one of their functions in trying to raise funds for the Nevada Historical Society. I think that those things are very valuable.

I also think that if the Virginia Street Bridge and the other bridges are going to go...I don't think there is any question that they are not safe, but we certainly were able to create a great deal of dialogue about that.

Ultimately when you have a bridge that crosses a river and it is part of a state highway, you do what has to be done. I think those things are valuable.

Besides the walking tours, are there other programs that HRPS sponsors that helps educate people?

Oh, yes. The fourth grade is when you do Nevada history in the public schools. HRPS now has a program revolving around fourth graders. We pay for buses and we take kids to historic sites in downtown Reno. Most of these kids have never been downtown. We take them to the Lake Mansion and they get to see it. We show them the courthouse, and take them to the train station and go downstairs and see the Women's Christian Temperance Association fountain that used to be a water fountain downtown.

These kids are absolutely blown away by this. The teachers love it. They are competing. In terms of resources, we couldn't do every fourth grade every year. I think that it is crucial. We have got to educate children about what this community is and how it has grown. I think that's really important.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about HRPS that you would want to include?

This may sound peculiar, but I wish it was more inclusive. It is not because HRPS is exclusive, but I remember one time we had Sue Fong Chung come and speak to our program meeting. Actually, the board had dinner with her. She is a professor at University of Nevada in Las Vegas and she is on a statewide cultural affairs committee. We have a few Asian people who come to our meetings. We had a whole community of Asians who came to that meeting because

she was talking about the area along the river and the tongs, which were Chinese social organizations.

That is a part of our history that I wish could be shared with the larger membership. I really do. The history of the Asian people, particularly Chinese people, in this state is very important because of what the Chinese did in the railroads, in building the ditches, the technology, and getting through Donner Summit. That is an area that I would like to see more inclusive. On the other hand, if that community doesn't want to join us, that is their choice.

Can you tell me about programs and concerts that you attend that you enjoy?

I also go to the Nevada Historical Society. I use it for research, but I also go up there. They do programs on a monthly basis at noon, and they also have museum exhibits. It is tremendously under-funded facility. The fact that they do that is really marvelous.

I take my grandchildren to the Fleischmann Planetarium, which is a wonderful asset in the community that we really aren't utilizing as much as we could.

I like to go to things in the daytime. I don't like to go out at night as much as I used to because I just don't see as well as I used to. I like the jazz music and things like that—the Pops Orchestra. I love chamber music, and I think the Chamber Music Festival during the holidays at the end of the year is first-class stuff. It is just absolutely first-class stuff.

The Music Department at the University of Nevada is filled with very talented professionals. I go to OLLI because I find OLLI very stimulating and it happens in the daytime. One of the programs that just left my mouth hanging open was when Jim Wynn came from the university and talked

to us about composing music...Beethoven, Brahms, and so on. Then he sat down at a piano and said, "Well, just call out some notes and I'll see if I can compose a piece."

So somebody said, "C-major." Somebody else said, "G." They called out random notes and the next thing you know, he was putting together a piece as we sat there. It was fabulous.

Elliot Parker comes. The people who come to OLLI from the university tell us again and again they enjoy coming because we are an enthusiastic group. I think that is a terrific outlet for senior citizens—those kinds of programs. You don't have to be bored in Reno.

Football games...I wish they weren't all at night. I think we have the most beautiful stadium in the country, and I'd like to see more games in the afternoon. Athletics at the university are fun.

Where have the physical facilities for the arts and culture been located in Reno?

Fortunately, I think arts and culture has been focused downtown. I was thrilled that we could save the Riverside Hotel because that used to be quite a place. When we lived on St. Lawrence Street, Nick and June Abelman lived close to us. He was the proprietor at the Corner Bar. We used to go into the Corner Bar now and then. I always went with my mother or other adults. I heard entertainers at the Riverside, I heard entertainers at the Mapes, and I heard entertainers at Harrah's. So it was fun downtown.

Then, of course, there is what takes place at the university. I've been up there several times to see performances at the university. There are a lot of programs going on at the university and TMCC as well.

What impact do the cultural activities have on Reno in general?

The story I told about the man from the North Valleys is a good illustration. It has no impact on him and his family, and that is too bad. For people like myself and people in this neighborhood where I live, there are many here who go to the Phil and the Museum of Art on a regular basis. They all have outreach.

I think that the whole issue is getting these things into the schools. That is why it is important for us to know who we are and where we are going. If we don't do that, if that is not one of our objectives, kids will not be exposed. The nature of our industries, if that is what you want to call them here, is there are an awful lot of parents who work very minimal-wage jobs and send their kids to school as much for an education as for daycare. Those kids need exposure. The only way I can think that we can get it to them is to get it to them in the schools or to bring the schools to the facilities.

Communities that do that (there are plenty of communities in this country who do that) find that it's beneficial to the welfare and the well-being of the community. It all takes money, and we have to figure that out. It is our job.

What changes in the availability of cultural organizations and events have you seen in Reno?

I think it is a great deal. I have to tell you when I left in 1960, there was stuff here. There always has been. Now there is this women's singing group called the Sweet Adelines, which developed while I was gone. I'm sure there are men's barbershop quartets. I mean, there always has been men's barbershop quartets and things like that.

Maybe we could do a little more in the way of making landmarks, although vandalism has a way of tearing those things up. We have seen this recently with the bronze things that have been stolen from up at Rancho San Rafael. We can't let that discourage us, though. We have to keep going, because there are more good people than there are naughty people.

I have a grandson who is fourteen and is a sweet, loving boy. His grandmother is trying really hard to get his attention and say, "Hey Allen, what do you want to be when you grow up?" Right now he is kind of coasting through school, and I worry about that for his future. I feel the same way about this community and this state. Hey, what do we want to be when we grow up? I think that is a conversation we always need to be having.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you feel is important to include?

I think that I would just like to add that this is a community that cares. I've always said I was born and raised here because I was two when I came. To be born and raised here, and to have people that I have known all my life, and who look out for me and who I look out for them, that is a very special thing. I hope that a lot of people have that kind of experience.

JUDITH WINZELER

Allison Tracy: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Judith Winzeler: I was born in northeastern Ohio in a small town called Hartville. It is about seventy miles south of Cleveland and about halfway between Canton and Akron. It was, as I look back on it, a nice childhood because we lived across the street from my grandmother, who was still operating a dairy farm as I was growing up. I had the advantages of being exposed to rural life without really being the daughter of a farmer, which would have been a lot of hard work.

This was the industrial part of Ohio—the Northeast—so certainly it wasn't an isolated rural area where I grew up. Hartville, as I look back, was kind of interesting. I suppose it was mainly white and Protestant. Yet during the war a number of people from Appalachia—Kentucky and Tennessee—moved into that area to work for Monarch Rubber, for rubber companies in Akron, or steel companies in Canton.

We had a lot of Amish and Mennonite families in that area, too. The Mennonites have become incredibly prosperous. The Amish have all moved out of that area because it has become too expensive for them for farming. It is now really the suburbs of Canton and Akron and is a very prosperous area.

I was very rooted in Ohio. My whole family, and most of my family on my mother's side, certainly was. My mother's side of the family went back to earliest settlers in Ohio. They had moved from farms in Pennsylvania to virgin forest land in Ohio. There was quite a large family that I was connected with in Ohio.

As I was growing up, the Snyder (descendants of my grandmother's grandparents) family reunion was a big deal. Now there is still a family reunion with descendants of my grandmother, now numbering in the hundreds. That sense of rootedness is perhaps something that I brought with me to Nevada and perhaps has some influence on how I approach my job and my feelings that I've developed for Nevada,

my second home. Coming from Ohio and a rural background, I've also always been able to understand and relate to rural people in Nevada, as well as to the folks in Reno and Las Vegas.

I went to a small school; my graduating class had seventy-two students. I was just back for the fifty-year class reunion, and a number of those students I had gone to school with for all twelve years. It is now one of the largest school districts in the state of Ohio. It was nice to go to a small school where everybody was involved with the chorus or the band, and went to every football game and basketball game. I basically had—it was the 1950s—the sort of education you got in the fifties. We always had excellent science teachers. The history teachers were all World War II veterans, and I had a great Latin teacher. We all studied Latin if we were in the college prep courses at that time.

You mentioned the band and the chorus, but were there any art classes?

Not that I remember.

Was there anything happening culturally in terms of local theaters, museums, or musical groups?

Well, we always had the school plays. You would go into Canton and Akron for cultural activities, ten to fifteen miles away. Certainly in school we always had school plays. It was a very active high school in that regard.

Can you tell me about your parents?

My parents. My mother was a nurse. She was the one that came from a large family. A couple of my aunts were nurses, and many

relatives went into teaching. She had three uncles who were ordained Lutheran ministers and a couple of cousins that were too. Her parents were farmers, but if you trace back through the family to her uncles and great-uncles, people in the family were involved in banking and hardware stores and just a wide range of activities.

My father's side of the family were the immigrants. His father had come from Eastern Europe, and worked in a tool and die factory. Like a lot of immigrants, though, he saved his money and bought a little land. He bought a farm out in the country a couple of miles from my mother's family farm. My parents attended the same one-room schoolhouse for a number of years.

My father had a ninth-grade education. In that family, the older boys quit school, and went to work in the factories or helped with work on the farm. They certainly made certain, though, that their younger brothers finished high school. My youngest uncle went on with the help of the G.I. Bill to get an engineering degree and worked for NASA for a number of years.

Even though my father had a ninth-grade education, he was an extremely smart man. He was a foreman at Hercules Motor Company. A number of people always encouraged him to go on to school to get an engineering degree. I have no doubt that he would have been capable of doing that, but there was the war and there was the family. He had his own machine shop that he developed over the years. He was very well known in the area because he could fix everything. He repaired all the farm equipment for the older farmers, the Amish, and the Mennonite in the area, who had ancient tractors that could only be repaired if somebody machined a new part. He was

a fix-it man and a handyman. He built his own house and loved to garden.

Both my parents were very active in the church. My mother was the Sunday School superintendent for years and years. My father was the secretary of the Church Council for years and years also. Despite his ninth-grade education, he served on the board of the St. Luke's Home, which was a Lutheran home for the elderly that was built in the fifties, I believe. He always handled all the repairs at the church.

Can you tell me where you went to college?

I went to Kent State [University]. I had met my husband before I started to school. He was a student at Kent State, though we had met at the local swimming hole that was just down the road from my house. My education was interrupted when he went off to graduate school at the University of Chicago. I actually finished up my bachelor's and my master's degrees here at the University of Nevada, Reno.

What brought you to Reno?

Bob got a job in the Anthropology Department. He was pretty much fresh out of graduate school. He taught for a year at Northern Illinois University and then applied for other jobs. There were, at that time, two people in the Anthropology Department with degrees from the University of Chicago, which might have had something to do with their interest in him. He had always been interested in going west. He was from Ohio too. His background is not that much different than mine. He has a Pennsylvania Dutch side and an immigrant side too. As a kid, he always read a lot of cowboys and Indians literature. His mother's family came from Zanesville, so

he had an interest in Zane Grey and Western writers. [laughs] We moved here in 1969.

What were you studying at Kent State?

I was actually studying biology at that time. I tend to do well in math, so the sciences were something I naturally gravitated to. I developed an interest in anthropology early on, though. As part of his doctoral work, Bob did his studies in Malaysia, so we went there as a family. We had two small girls at that time. We lived in Malaysia for about a year and a half. I think once you have had an overseas experience it changes you, and if you're married to an anthropologist, you had better like it and have similar interests. You're either going to be left at home a lot or feel pretty miserable going along unless you're enjoying it too.

Once we came back, I switched my interest to anthropology. I find it a discipline that's very broad in nature and asks a lot of interesting questions.

So you studied anthropology at UNR?

Yes.

What was the department like, and what was it like being a student?

Well, it didn't seem to be a problem that I was the wife of a faculty member. Nobody seemed to mind. Indeed, in the Anthropology Department, Don and Catherine Fowler, both now emeritus professors, were a couple, the wife of Warren d'Azevedo (who was a founding member) went on to study anthropology. Now, Gary Haynes is married to an anthropologist, and there are other couples in the Anthropology Department.

Again, it seems to be that you need to develop some similar interests for the marriage to last. [laughs]

I mentioned my rural experiences. Well, we lived in Chicago for several years where Bob was a student, so I certainly have those urban experiences in my background too. It certainly was strange to go from Chicago to Nevada.

What were your impressions of Reno when you first came here?

Well, it was very strange. The aridity, the openness, the brownness, the dryness, and of course it seemed incredibly provincial. I mean, this was the period in the sixties in Chicago when cities were burning, and we were all wearing miniskirts. You seemed sort of out of place if you arrived in Reno in a miniskirt. [laughs] They were throwing people in jail for any sort of use of drugs. Not that we were doing anything like that in Chicago, but certainly students at the University of Chicago were.

We came back from fieldwork in Malaysia to Chicago in 1967, moved here in 1969, so there was a little time in between. It was the period when the [Vietnam] war had really taken off. The war hadn't been in the news that much when we left for Malaysia in 1966, but by the time we came back, it was a huge issue in this country. Even though Malaysia wasn't that far away from Vietnam, it wasn't really part of our mindset that much until we came back. There was just tremendous culture shock coming back... culture shock leaving in the first place, but it was perhaps even worse coming back.

What changes had you seen between when you left and when you came back?

The anti-war movement had really picked up and the war was front and center in everyone's attention. I guess that the first time you have had an international experience like we had—we were living in a small town and Bob was working in villages—you never look at your own society in quite the same way again. You don't quite realize that is going to happen. It is kind of shocking to realize how much you have changed and how much your perceptions have changed.

When you came to Reno, were you at all surprised and/or disappointed by what you found here in terms of culturally what was going on?

I can't remember that I thought about it that much. Certainly one of the fun parts about being in Chicago and even at the university itself, were the many opportunities available. We had a chance to hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and go to concerts by Ravi Shankar. Some of my friends were very actively involved in folk arts and folklore at that point. They were out discovering folk musicians, some of whom now perform and have been performing at the Cowboy Poetry gatherings at the Western Folklife Center. That is kind of neat. We heard Glen Orlin back in the sixties in Chicago; he is one of the regular performers in Elko now. We were pretty connected with the university once we moved here, and the university was bringing in speakers and other programs.

Was there a focus for your studies in anthropology while you were at UNR?

My master's thesis was based on the study of marketing women in Pasir mas, Kelantan, the town we were living in in Malaysia.

Can you tell me how you first became involved in Nevada Humanities?

It was kind of an accident. My background wouldn't suggest that I am the person that might have become the director of Nevada Humanities. Nevada Humanities is one of 56 state humanities councils that receives an annual operating grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

During the first few years that we were here, I was going to school part-time. We had small children in school. I knew the person who was the assistant. I think she was called administrative assistant or executive assistant. She was the second person in charge, whatever the title was. Her name was Darlene Ammons [later Darlene Reed]. Her boyfriend at the time was an anthropology student, so that was the connection. She was going off for graduate work and was leaving the job. I just happened to run into her one day and said, "I was thinking maybe it was time I should be looking for a job."

She said, "Well, you should apply for my job." And I did. [laughs] I don't think the competition was very stiff at that time. The director's background was in English, so they were looking for somebody with a different perspective. Years later I did ask one of the board members why they hired me, of all people, and he said, "It wasn't so much what you brought to the job; it was what you didn't have working against you." [laughs]

At that point I had been teaching part-time in the community college for a year. I hadn't really had that much work experience prior to that. I had done some part-time work when we were in Chicago at the University of Chicago, and then I taught part-time at the community college, so I didn't have much of a work background.

Certainly they would never hire anybody like that now, [laughs] that is, with little work experience and limited professional background. I was very lucky to fall into this job back in 1977.

I was basically hired as a program officer. Then within a year, because I do have some natural administrative and organizational abilities, they asked me to take on more administrative work. I became the assistant director the following year, and then a year later was promoted to associate director. When the director resigned in 1984, I applied for the job and was hired.

Had you finished your coursework and your degree work by that time?

Pretty much so. I hadn't finished writing the thesis at the time I was hired. That was dragging on, and so I had to sit down and do it. [laughs] I'm actually one of the few people, maybe the only director over the years of a humanities council with a degree in anthropology. One of our NEH program officers did have a degree in anthropology, but it was kind of unusual. Most people who are hired have a background in history, literature, or philosophy—one of the core disciplines in the humanities. In my case, not having as strong a background in those areas, though certainly an appreciation and interest in them, I always hired other staff that did have credentials in core humanities disciplines. Our board was for a long period of time half comprised of the members who were scholars in the humanities, so certainly the humanities always were well represented by staff and board.

What were your perceptions of Nevada Humanities before you were hired?

I don't think I was acquainted with it at all. I knew one person who worked for Nevada Humanities and that was it. It had been around by the time I was hired for about five years. Reading back through the early history, they were just trying to get their footing, find out who they were, and what they were all about. There was a lot of change in the first five years. So I can't remember that I was really familiar at all with the organization.

Can you tell me how and when Nevada Humanities got started?

It was started in 1971. Ed Miller was president of the university at that time. Robert Whittemore, who was dean of Agricultural Extension, if I remember correctly, noticed that these grants were being given by the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish state humanities committees. Whittemore and Larry Hyde, dean of the Judicial College, formed the citizen committee and applied for the initial grant. The National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts were both created in 1965 by an act of Congress. The arts had been very active in trying to get federal funding and an endowment started, and partnered with the humanities who also had an interest.

I always heard the story that Robert Laxalt went around campus with a signup sheet, getting people to sign a petition to take forward to our representatives urging the creation of a national endowment for the humanities. Now, perhaps this was just the prejudice of the people who were telling me this, but I think in Nevada it was the humanities more than the arts, and partly Robert Laxalt and the connection he had with politics, that played a key role in the creation of this federal legislation.

At that time there were a few states that already had states' arts organizations of one sort or another. As part of that authorizing legislation, or certainly early on in 1965, NEA created state arts councils. State arts councils right from the beginning have been part of the National Endowment for the Arts.

NEH was not involved at the state level. More of the emphasis was on things like presidential papers, and research in the humanities. It was only in the 1970s that the leadership of the National Endowment for the Humanities brought up the idea of starting the state councils. By this time, though, the era of the Great Society had passed. There was a lot of money going towards the War in Vietnam, though President Nixon did increase the allocations for both of the endowments.

At the state level there was really no interest in another state agency. The state humanities councils were created over a period of years—not all at once. Nevada was one of the early ones. All the state councils were set up as citizen committees originally, then a little later were chartered as private nonprofit organizations. They were set up in very different ways in different places depending on who applied for those original grants. The offices of the Illinois and California councils are located in the financial districts of Chicago and San Francisco; about a third of us had some sort of a university affiliation and those councils were often located on campus.

There is a great deal of variation in terms of how the state councils are organized and how they function. They are fairly similar, but they operate differently than the Arts Councils, which are state agencies with governor-appointed boards. As a nonprofit, we had a larger board, and the control was really with the board itself. Half of the

members were humanities scholars and half of them were on the board to represent the community in various ways. The advantage of being a nonprofit was a fair amount of autonomy. The disadvantage, perhaps, of not being a state agency is not being part of the state budget. The state never had to match our federal funds. They did have to match the state arts council funds in order to benefit from the federal dollars. It is the same thing with state historic preservation programs; that is another federal program the state has to match. In our case, the state didn't have to match our NEH grant.

One of our great accomplishments was getting into the state budget, which we have been a part of for twenty years. Since we were not a state agency, it was always a little tenuous. The relationship could end just any year, and it may this year. Who knows? We hope not. Nevada Humanities kept its place as a line item in the 2011-13 budget but was funded at a substantially reduced amount.

When you first got involved, where were the physical offices located for Nevada Humanities?

When I was hired, the physical offices were on campus in the Artemesia Building, and the southern Nevada office was in downtown Las Vegas. For a while the Reno office was in the Center for Religion and Life, which is now called the Newman Center. The Center for Religion and Life had been very active as a programming center back in the 1970s and the early 1980s.

We then moved into a little house on Sierra Street that is owned by the university, where the office has been for twenty years now. In Las Vegas, too, the office for a while was in the Center for Religion and Life just on the

edge of campus. Now the office is actually on campus.

The Las Vegas office was closed in 1992 and staff consolidated in the Reno office. With the help of state funds, the southern Nevada office was reopened in 1997.

What is the nature of the relationship between Nevada Humanities and the university?

Well, I suppose our relationship is like that of the National Judicial College, Channel 5, or the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. They all have space on campus, but they operate independently. Ours was perhaps just a little closer. Since we were so small, our contracts went through the university. We really were pretty much treated like university employees over the years and like a university department. Within the university structure, Nevada Humanities falls under Extended Studies. We didn't receive any university money, so anything we received from the university was strictly in-kind: space on campus, library privileges and use of the Internet and computers. It is a considerable financial advantage for the organization, but there is clearly a lot of autonomy and always has been. Originally the federal grant went through the UNR Grants and Contracts office, but over time that changed. The university didn't really want the accountability, and we preferred to manage things ourselves anyway.

Can you tell me about the structure of Nevada Humanities?

There is a paid staff. It has always been a fairly small staff. It hasn't really increased in size that much from what it was back in the mid 1970s. I think there is now a board of twenty-one members. For a number of years

it was a board of fifteen or sixteen members. They are all volunteers. It is a statewide organization, and originally it was really set up as a re-granting organization. We received a grant from National Endowment for the Humanities. A certain amount could be set aside for administrative costs, and the rest was awarded in grants. The main purpose of the board initially, in addition to setting policy and oversight, was to act on the grant applications that staff would bring before them and then staff would administer. Over time Nevada Humanities became more of a programming organization. There were a number of reasons for why that happened.

Who were some of the people that you remember being on the committee when you started at Nevada Humanities?

Frank Lucash in the UNR Philosophy Department was on the board. Wilbur Shepperson in the UNR History Department was on the board and was a very influential person on the committee over those years. The chair when I was hired was Patricia Marchese. She worked at that point in Cultural Affairs for the city of Las Vegas and was married to a librarian, Lamar Marchese, who became the founding director of the Nevada Public Radio station in Las Vegas. They were two very important people in cultural affairs in southern Nevada. Hazel Potter was a librarian from Reno. Lavonne Lewis was the human resources director for Reynolds Electric and Engineering. It was the company that did a lot of work on the Nevada Test Site at that time. Myrna Williams was a social worker on the faculty of UNLV who went on to become a state assemblywoman and then a county commissioner in Las Vegas. Elizabeth Warren was an anthropologist. Her husband was an archeologist and one of the founding members

of the Archeology Department at UNLV. She was very active in historic preservation in southern Nevada. Jerry Nielsen worked for the Department of Education. Bob Goicoechea was an attorney in Elko. Vernon Mattson was a historian at UNLV. Charles Greenhaw was assistant to the president at Northern Nevada Community College and a particularly important member. That is probably not quite all of them, but that is a pretty good list. We always had an extremely interesting board, really wonderful people.

You mentioned the composition of people who were more on the academic side and then people that were more in the public sector. How did that specific composition come about?

It was an NEH requirement initially that half of the board be what they would call “academic humanists.” We have tended to refer to them more as “scholars in the humanities.” “Secular humanist” became a really negative term at a certain period. The word “humanist” was something to be avoided if you could. It was never a big issue in this state, but it certainly was in some states, where the humanities council was getting tagged with the term “secular humanist.”

Initially, it was an NEH requirement that half of the people—it is written right into the legislation—be people who distinguish themselves by virtue of their accomplishments or degrees in the humanities. In terms of public members, ours tended to be people from libraries, museums, and education more so than industry and business, which I think is kind of unfortunate. It meant that we were probably not as good at tapping private money as we might have been had we had more connections with businesses.

In the 1980s, we were encouraged to increase the board size. There is a cost, though,

for a state this size to have a large board when people have to travel to meetings. We always had a geographical formula population-wise. Rural Nevada was overrepresented and Las Vegas underrepresented, but it worked fairly well if you were trying to represent the whole state. For a number of years we had four members from rural Nevada, five from Reno, and seven from Las Vegas.

It was a self-perpetuating board in a sense. We always actively solicited nominations, but it was the board itself that chose the new board members. They served three years terms, were eligible for a second three-year term, and then they rotated off.

Then in the late 1970s, the authorizing legislation was changed so that the governor was given the authority to appoint members of the board. The current mandate is for the governor to appoint 25 percent of the board in order to strengthen that bond with state government.

I know that there is a board chair or committee chair. Do they serve generally two-year terms?

Generally. They are elected for one year and eligible for reelection for a second year.

What is the balance between the chair and the executive director? How does that relationship work?

It is pretty much the same as it is with any nonprofit. The chair represents the board and is the liaison with the director for the board. The executive director, in working with the board, works through the chair. Different states could be set up differently, but we always had an executive committee with a chair and a vice chair and three at-large members. They would meet pretty regularly. The board would meet three or four times a

year. The executive committee would meet monthly.

How did the executive committee function in relation to the rest of the board?

They were the group that would handle any business in between board meetings, but also tended to take more responsibility with budgeting, policy making, and any problems with the grants and grantees that would arise in between. They were considered the leadership.

Were there ever any disagreements or tension between staff and the board in terms of goals for Nevada Humanities?

Not really during my directorship. There were, as I understand it, some issues early on, before I was hired. Whether those were really differences of opinion, I don't know. While I was director, though, the board members were the bosses. What they want goes. I always thought it was a pretty cordial relationship and pretty supportive both ways—the board of the staff, and the staff of the board's interests. We were always pretty forward-thinking and recognized as having a leadership position in the cultural community. I think we did a lot of things over the years that the board was very pleased with. We did have some recognition at the national level for the quality of our programs and for some of the things that we accomplished. We were very involved, I think, in establishing partnerships and collaborations with a larger cultural community.

When we were holding what were called the Oasis Conferences—a statewide cultural conference—our board members were meeting regularly with board members from other cultural organizations, particularly

the ones we were involved with: the Nevada Arts Council, the State Office of Historic Preservation, the Nevada State Museum, and the Nevada Historical Society. For the most part, the board and the staff have had a pretty strong relationship.

Who was on staff and what notable staff changes have there been?

There have been really a couple of outstanding staff people over the years. Joe Finkhouse was hired as the assistant director for the Las Vegas office in 1989. He worked for us for six years. He hadn't completed his Ph.D. dissertation, so we gave him time off to do that. His field was comparative literature. He was awarded his doctorate from Brown University while he was working for us. He had a real facility when it came to writing. He was just a marvelous writer and a very clear thinker. He was hired just about the time that the National Endowment for the Humanities began offering what they called Exemplary Awards. These were grants for projects that state councils would carry out themselves. We had received one earlier for "To Carry the Dream Wheel: Native American Voices of the Old/New World." Joe prepared three of those proposals while he worked for us, and all of them were funded. They were really marvelous projects. One focused on Asia and on the Asian American experience here in Nevada. One was on Water in the West. Another one was on Nevada in the Nuclear Age.

It was a real loss when he left. Everybody recognized what an outstanding person he was. He was actually cultivated by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities when the longstanding director there left. They asked him to apply for that job. He moved to Rhode Island. His wife, who he met here,

had taught French in the Foreign Languages Department. She decided, not having a job back there, to go to law school. She got a job in Boston. So he left Rhode Island and they moved to Boston. He, as far as I know, is still the director of the Study Abroad Program at Boston University.

Bill Marion was the person who worked for us in Las Vegas for a couple of years before Joe did. He, too, was ABD. I can't remember whether he finished up his PhD or not, but he left us to go to work for Harry Reid. He worked for Harry Reid for quite a number of years until fairly recently. He probably worked for Harry Reid for at least fifteen years. He ran his Las Vegas office at one point, then worked for him in Washington, D.C. He was really a fine program officer.

Kris Darnall worked for us for a number of years. She was hired in the late nineties, so she worked for us for about ten years. She had exceptional organizational skills and really got the book festival going in Las Vegas.

Steve Davis still works for the committee and has a wonderful way with people. He is a much loved person, and is very well connected with the arts community. He is a historian but also a photographer. There has been a fair amount of longevity among the small staff. There has been a lot of stability, though right now there are a lot of board and staff changes. Christina Barr was hired as executive director in January 2009, staff has changed in the Las Vegas office, and Steve Davis has announced his retirement in January 2012. When there are a lot of board and staff changes, it takes a while for everybody to get on board and get things going at the same level again.

What committee members or board chairs that you worked with stand out in your mind as being particularly influential in the organization?

They were all good. They were different. I enjoyed working with every one in one way or another. Clearly, Wilbur Shepperson, who served as chairman a couple of times, had a real strong interest in the work that we did. He was somebody who had a strong personality, had a lot of influence on directions that the board took, and was well known statewide. He had been hired at UNR in the early 1950s, then helped to start the History Department at UNLV. He was well known in rural Nevada, and was well connected. He served on the boards of the Nevada State Museum and the Nevada Historical Society, and was one of the people who helped start the University of Nevada Press. Clearly he was an interesting chair to work with. He was an intellectual person and a close friend of Bob Laxalt's. He knew all the governors well, knew the congressmen well, so he could certainly see that Nevada Humanities was treated well. He could certainly take on the powers that be any time if he needed to, or if he felt that we should be allowed to do certain things that didn't quite fit with the NEH guidelines.

Early on we started a journal in the humanities that people back at NEH thought was not really the proper kind of project for a state council which was to fund public humanities programs. The argument for us doing a journal back in those days made a lot of sense. Other than the *Historical Society Quarterly*, there were no publications coming out of Nevada. Having his own personal interests in publication and scholarship, Wilbur Shepperson saw the journal as a record for what we were doing and as a way to advance the intellectual credibility of the state. It was something permanent. When you publish something, there is a permanence whereas programs where people just talk come and go.

I think he was responsible for suggesting we start the annual humanities lecture. We brought in a number of prominent scholars, and their talks then became the lead article in *Halcyo: A Journal of the Humanities*. A number of the other articles would grow out of the programs that we funded. We were funding research projects and projects on a whole range of topics. The publication grew over the years, was very interdisciplinary, and was very important. People respected it a lot and looked forward to receiving it.

Dina Titus was the first chairman after I became executive director. She was a person who was very focused and knew just what she wanted. She went on, of course, to become state senator and a U.S. congresswoman for a term. Her background is in political science. She is married to Tom Wright, whose father started the History Department at UNLV. She continued to be a strong and loyal friend of the humanities and had a lot to do with protecting our state funding. We received our state funding initially before she was a member of the legislature, but increasing that amount and getting us enough in the late 1990s to reopen the Las Vegas office was something that she was very much responsible for. She remained involved in programs and part of our Speakers Bureau, and has remained a close friend all those years and still is.

Marilyn Melton was another person who was a remarkable chairman and really grabbed a hold of the job. She was married to Rollan Melton. Rollan Melton sat on the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, so there was always money that came our way, thanks to Marilyn Melton. She loved the Humanities and really gave it her all. We used to hold a lot of receptions and fundraising events at her home. Her home on Mt. Rose Street had at one time been the home of the president of the university.

She had a good leadership sense. The board loved Marilyn. She was the one person for whom they changed the bylaws to keep her on for a third term (1988-91). She was such a good chairman, and a lot of fun. I mean, Marilyn is just fun. She has an artistic sense that was really wonderful, and was very hands-on in how the office should look and how our printed material should look. Of course she has done a lot of other things too. She started the Writers Hall of Fame when she was president of the UNR Friends of the Library. She knows Nevada. This is a state where 80 percent of the population came from somewhere else. Over the years, we really had just a handful of board members who were native Nevadans, and she was one of them. She knew everybody and she knew the state's history. She was a great asset.

After Marilyn, we had Mary-ellen McMullen, who is chair again right now. She served on the board from 1987 to 1993 and then was appointed to the board in 2008 by Governor Gibbons. She and her husband are very successful lobbyists. He is a lawyer. Her father was Dean of the College of Education, Edmund Cain. She had done a lot of humanities projects before she actually came on the board. She and her husband had a little to do with getting the legislation passed for the Nevada Cultural Commission. It grew out of the Oasis Conference which I just touched on. The collaboration that was taking place between Humanities, the Arts Council, Historic Preservation, the State Museum, Nevada Historical Society...out of that came this piece of legislation giving the state the authority to, over a ten-year period, sell bonds. The bond sales gave the commissioners two million dollars a year to award for creating cultural facilities in historic structures. Because of the bonding requirements, the funds did have to be used

for bricks and mortar. The justification for the bricks and mortar, though, had to be that this historic structure was being preserved for cultural use. It could become a museum, it could become an art center, or what have you.

The commissioners who acted on these grants that awarded the two million dollars a year were the chairman of Nevada Humanities, chairman of the Arts Council, two people from the State Museum and the Nevada Historical Society, chairman of Historic Preservation, and somebody representing tourism. That has been quite a legacy over the years. The Nevada Cultural Commission was so successful in saving historic structures, a lot of them in rural Nevada, that it was reauthorized with an increase in the budget. They now give three million dollars away a year, and it was authorized for another ten years.

So, Mary-ellen McMullen and her husband, a lobbyist very active in politics for both Republican and Democratic Party, had connections that were very helpful and important. She was a great chairwoman.

John H. Brebbia was an interesting chair. He is a lawyer in Las Vegas. His wife had worked in the Kennedy White House. He was very close to Harry Reid. He went on to serve as a board member of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, which is our umbrella organization.

In the late 1990s, we had four academics in a row as chair: Michelle Mackedon from Fallon, who taught at the community college; Phil Boardman, who started the Core Humanities program at UNR, served on the board and became well acquainted with people back at NEH. He got the funding from NEH to start that program. Chris Hudgins also served. He was chair of the English Department and then became Dean of Liberal

Arts at UNLV. He was very instrumental in building the international creative writing program, and ultimately the Institute of Modern Letters. He had something to do with getting Las Vegas created as a city of asylum for persecuted writers.

Barbara Cloud was a very dynamic chair. She was assistant to the President of UNLV, the Associate Provost for Academics. Her background was in journalism history. She had a serious stroke while she was chair, which was unfortunate. She was chair at the time of 9/11, which, of course, had a big impact on everything.

Nora James was the last chair I served under. She took a very strong interest in the humanities. It was time for our annual review, so she really pushed strategic planning. Under her leadership we developed a new five-year plan, which I have left to the new director and the current staff to implement. She was a very hands-on chair.

What are the humanities?

A question I love. [laughs] One of the problems the organization has always had is that the humanities are not well understood. People don't know what they are and it is not easy to define them. People know what the arts are, they know what the sciences are, but they don't know what the humanities are. They often confuse them with the arts. The authorizing legislation for the Endowments separates arts and humanities and says, "The arts will do this. The humanities will do this."

Over the years there have been many discussions on the board, asking, "Is this an arts project or is it a humanities project?" It also took the board some time in its earlier years to figure out what a public humanities program was. In the authorizing legislation, the humanities were defined in terms of

academic disciplines and associated with universities. So what was a public humanities program? It was our mandate to do public humanities programs.

The definition in the authorizing legislation says that the humanities are the study of history, literature, philosophy, comparative religion, jurisprudence, archeology, theory in criticism of the arts, those aspects of the social science that are historical or theoretical in nature, and the study of the environment as it relates to the human condition. That is not quite everything. I would have to go look up the definition, but you get the general idea. It is those academic disciplines that are the study of mankind.

The humanities tend to be very text oriented. When William Bennett in particular was the Chairman of NEH, he emphasized that every program had to have a textual basis. Everything the State Humanities Councils did had to tie back to a text. So there you have it.

You can also talk about the humanities as the best that has ever been thought or written. Clearly, history is very important within the humanities—where we have come from, what are the forces that have shaped who we are, how have they shaped our current society, and where do we want to go. The humanities do tend to be rooted in the past. Scholarship is very much a part of the humanities.

What is a public humanities program? When I would speak to groups, rather than try to come up with definitions, I would often talk about what we do. I could talk about Ken Burns' series on the Civil War. There is a wonderful humanities program—very interdisciplinary, deals with American history, but it is for the public and greatly appreciated by the public.

Of our own programs, Chautauqua became our flagship project here. A lot of people might see Chautauqua as the arts

because clearly it is performance to an extent. We looked at it differently than arts people might have looked at it. Even though to be effective you need some performance skills—you need to be a good storyteller and have a presence on stage—for us the importance was the scholarship that went into it. The fact that the presenters were scholars and didn't just write the script and memorize, but were really well versed in the biography and in the history of the period, and with the issues. The emphasis was always on using the biography of a historical person to lay out issues that are of enduring humanistic interest.

For the humanities, the same issues come around and around: war and peace; what is a good life; what is a just society? We approached Chautauqua as humanities scholars, not as artists, even though certainly the arts are an important part of what we do.

Certainly, in terms of the arts the literary arts are probably the arts form that we were most closely affiliated with in a way. We had a series called Books and Authors. We started the Great Basin Book Festival in Reno, which we kept going for six years. We then started it the Vegas Valley Book Festival, which continues today.

So is that good enough for a definition of the humanities? It is complicated. We always had a pretty well-informed and educated board, and they got it. They knew what a humanities project was. Sometimes we had the discussion of whether a project was a humanities project or not. Were the humanities central? That was the primary eligibility criteria of a grant, and it wasn't always clear. But the scholars were always there to speak to that. My own personal criteria for what made a good humanities project was that you wanted it to appeal to a broad section of people who would find it interesting and engaging. Humanities scholars had to feel that

it was a program that had quality, authenticity, and accuracy. We couldn't just have anybody out there talking about any topic. There was a certain criteria we brought to finding those scholars who have public interests, who are fine educators, and good with the public... it's not just the scholars who are an important part of the program. One of the requirements was always that a scholar in the humanities had to be involved in every project. If not, it wasn't funded. It didn't meet one of the primary criteria.

What is Nevada Humanities' mission in relation to the state of Nevada?

It is to bring the humanities to the people of Nevada. More specifically, one of the areas where we had a strong interest right from the beginning was in Nevada history and in issues that are unique to Nevada. This was partly because the state is the way it is. Eighty percent of the population is born elsewhere, so you have newcomers coming into the state all the time. A lot of them just develop a natural interest in knowing something about the place where they now live. We would also argue that it is really important to try to connect them with the history, background, and people of Nevada. If you are going to make this home, you need to feel a sense of rootedness here and you need to know something about this place.

It was also very clear that even though Nevada has this interesting history, much of it had not been well documented. Now that is starting to change. When I was hired, Russ Elliot was one of the few people trained in Nevada history. He was a native Nevadan from Ely. Jim Hulse's field was Russian history, but since he was a native from Pioche, he became a Nevada historian too. Wilbur Shepperson studied European history, but he developed local interests, too. There was the Historical

Society and the History Department, but there was still a lot that hadn't been done related to Nevada history. Particularly in rural Nevada, that vast space with its rich history, not much had been done.

Early on, we were always interested in supporting work in Nevada history. We gave some research grants, helped support publications in that area, supported exhibits for small museums, brought together the directors of small museums across Nevada and provided some professional training for them, funded radio programs, films, etc....

Nevada history has always been important, and the cumulating project for all of this interest in Nevada history is the Online Nevada Encyclopedia, which serves to make Nevada history more visible and accessible to people. It was important with teachers, all of who came from elsewhere, to give them some sense of Nevada history. We funded a number of teacher institutes over the years that acquainted people with Nevada history, the people, and the issues.

People new to the state aren't necessarily familiar with the issues that face Nevada, which is why we did a lot of programming over the years on water in the West. We did a wonderful lecture series one year on Nevada in the Nuclear Age, focusing on the proposed nuclear waste storage facility at Yucca Mountain.

We've also always been interested in programs on American history. Under certain chairmen at NEH there has been a strong emphasis on American history. That was true under Sheldon Hackney, Bruce Cole, Lynne Cheney, and Bill Bennett. We did quite a bit with American history over the years. That was especially true after 9/11—the emphasis in going back to our roots, what we are all about as a democratic nation, the founding fathers, and that sort of thing. We

did a number of Chautauqua programs over the year with Thomas Jefferson and other presidents.

We were involved with the Teaching American History grants that both the Clark and Washoe County School District got from the Department of Education for training teachers. Those were really excellent programs that involved the History Departments on both campuses, too. They emphasized content and really developed a sense of professionalism among American history teachers in the high school.

We had broader interest than history, and did a lot with literature over the years. Going way back, early on, one of my very favorite programs was Children's Literature: Open Door to the Humanities. This project brought in ten well-known writers of children's books and sent them out on bookmobiles to every corner of the state. The people involved in that project remained involved in children's literature and did programs together for years. Poet as Humanist was another early literary program, and Bloomsday in Las Vegas: A Celebration of James Joyce. We did lots of literary programs over the years, and of course started the book festivals.

Then I suppose my own background in anthropology and having traveled widely had some influence on our programming. I've always had a strong interest in programs that expanded people's vision beyond the local and American culture. I was just thinking of one, having recently read Greg Mortenson's second book set in Afghanistan, *Stones into Schools*.... He mentions Nazif Shahrani, who was teaching at UNR in the late seventies. He is an anthropologist who is an Afghan himself, and studied the Kirghiz in Afghanistan. He is mentioned in Mortenson's book.

While he was here, one of the really interesting programs we did was called The

Warp and Weft of Islam. He was a graduate of the University of Washington, and some friends of his there had developed an exhibit with one of the museums (maybe the university museum) in Seattle with NEH funding. It was a display of Oriental rugs tying the rugs to the religion, the culture, and all sort of things. We brought the text panels from that exhibit to the Nevada Museum of Art here in Reno, but collected the rugs locally. It was just great fun. It was a wonderful program, looking at the rugs in terms of the arts, weaving techniques, and design, but also the symbolism, the meaning, and the relationship to religion in various ways.

We did some other interesting anthropological and cross-cultural programs. One was called Curers and Healers. We brought in a *curandera*, a Hispanic healer, as part of the program. We took people to Fallon for a Native American sweat lodge experience. The program was organized and put together by scholars.

We've done a fair amount of programming with Native Americans in this area, too. One of our major grants, To Carry the Dream Wheel: Native American Voices in the Old/New World, was on Native American history and literature. LaVerne Jeanne, who went on to get a position in the Anthropology Department at UNR, was in Nevada and was the wife of a geologist living in Round Mountain. She was our project coordinator. She has a Ph.D. in linguistics from MIT and is Hopi. She knew the contacts and the literature.

So we really had wonderful programs bringing in prominent Native American writers, doing a lot with Native American art and contemporary artists, and dealing with the history of how the Native American arts have evolved and developed.

Over the years, she was worked with the tribes around the state on language retention, so we funded several language conferences. We funded a number of exhibits. We funded writers going onto reservations. We worked with some Native American Washoe, Shoshone, and Paiute teachers in the schools. Five or six of them put together a wonderful curriculum on Nevada Indians that, as far as I know, is still in print today. Anyway, we have done lots of stuff over the years that I think has been very valuable.

Getting ready for this interview, something I was thinking about was the Lifescapes program at Osher, since this oral history is being funded by the Osher Foundation. The Lifescapes program is really big at OLLI. It's my understanding that people line up to get into those classes. The instructors, Margo Daniels and Joy Starling, just give their all to that program. People go to class every two weeks, and they write and they publish.

There is an interesting Humanities connection with all of that because the Lifescapes program was started by Steven Tchudi and Monica Greco, initially with Humanities funding. Monica Greco liked the idea of older people having something to read and discuss. She looked at her mother, whose life, as she got older, was so empty. Monica wanted to do something, but Steven Tchudi was the person with the expertise, in a sense. Together they worked with the libraries, especially Julie Machato, who had a long a connection with the humanities. She is part of a music group, Shiloh, that every year for sixteen years was the opening act at the Great Basin Chautauqua. So they started Lifescapes in the libraries, and then it was picked up by Osher.

Steven Tchudi had started working with the Humanities as soon as he moved to Nevada. We were just starting Chautauqua

at that time, and he started a teacher institute as part of Chautauqua. The emphasis of that teacher institute was reading and writing the West. For a number of years, he did teacher institutes where the emphasis was on your own personal experiences in relationship to where you live, and on writing as one way to learn, and to develop a sense of place.

I had mentioned the journal that we did. Wilbur Shepperson edited the first fourteen volumes of *Halcyon*. Tom Wright, an historian at UNLV, edited another three issues. Steven Tchudi volunteered to be the next editor. Well, just after he became editor, our funding was cut. This was the Contract with America period when the Endowments were both threatened. We took a substantial loss in income, not as bad for the State Councils as for NEH as a whole, but suddenly we didn't really have the money for *Halcyon*, even though we had done it on a shoestring, even though all the labor, all the time that people put in was donated. It was just the printing cost itself. But prior to that, the University of Nevada Press had handled the production part of it and done it pro bono. Well, they were under crisis too.

So Steve and his students decided to learn how to self-publish. They did the production work. They put out the five issues. This was also when we had a chance to publish *The Donner Party Chronicles*, so they got involved with that too. Steve and his graduate students developed a great deal of expertise in how to use computers to put out a book. All of that then fed into Lifescapes—that experience of teaching other people to write, and to publish. When they developed Lifescapes, all of that came together, and they developed a booklet on how to do it.

At Osher Lifelong Learning, one of their star programs, something they're particularly proud of is Lifescapes. It's got

this long association with Steven Tchudi, who's got this long association with Nevada Humanities. I think this example helps make a couple of points about the value of what we did.

There were many creative people who worked with us. The relationship with us plus the funds we could put behind a project, just made a tremendous difference. What people were able to accomplish was like a concentric circle that just kept getting bigger and bigger. The implications of some of the things that were started just have ramifications that go on and on.

Many of the OLLI speakers, too, have worked closely with us. As best I can tell, a lot of their most successful programs are the English professors, Phil Boardman, Anne Howard, David Fenimore—almost all of them have worked with Nevada Humanities at some time or another.

It sounds like Nevada Humanities attracts the movers and shakers in the state

Well, I think so. People have told me that then they moved here, wondering what was going on, people would send them our way. When I first started, population of the state was a third of what it is now. It was probably about 700,000 people. That's a small population to maintain much in the way of a cultural environment. So when we started bringing in major speakers and conferences and exhibits, I mean, we were it.

In those early years, the late 1970s and 1980s, we were doing a lot of programming on campus because everybody saw the campus as the center of activity, artistic, intellectual, what have you. So we did a lot of programs on campus. Now we would never do anything on campus; campus has gotten so big, parking is such a problem.

Our programs were the only game in town, and now really there are so many activities to choose from. It's far more competitive, really. So there was a real niche for us in the beginning, and still is, and that's good.

You said there's a lot more competition today for programming.

For audiences, for grants, for money, for media attention. It keeps you on your toes.

What changes have there been in the state to lead to that? I suspect population's probably one of them, but are there other changes that led to that increase and what's available and that competition?

Well, I think money. I think the fact that the federal government created the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the state arts and humanities councils made a big difference. The Humanities Committee has brought at least ten million, maybe twelve million, maybe more in federal dollars to the state of Nevada. And certainly there would be that much money that came through the Arts Council, and that much or more through Historic Preservation. So that kind of money starts making a difference, I think. With Arts Council and Historic Preservation, federal dollars had to be matched with state funds. So right away you've got public money going into cultural activities where before there was no public money going towards culture, or very little. There was state money for the Historical Society and Nevada State Museum, but not really any for the arts.

It was a little different in Las Vegas. By the time I was hired, both the city of Las Vegas and the county had cultural departments, but

the difference down there is that you never had much of a nonprofit environment that developed. Here in the north, you did have nonprofits, strong nonprofits that started the Opera, the Philharmonic, the Art Museum. Those organizations had been around a little longer, but most arts organizations were just getting started, really, in the sixties and seventies. You had Public Television, KLVX, affiliated with the school district in Las Vegas by the time I was hired, but Public Radio in Las Vegas, KNPR, and Public Television in Reno, KNPB, had not. Again, that's a source of public money coming in.

In our case, we have received a little bit of state money starting in 1989, but basically have not had much. One of the requirements is that the NEH grants have to be matched dollar-for-dollar. We always matched them about three-to-one, but most of that was really in-kind—peoples' time and donated services and media coverage, that sort of thing. But still, if you think about that, suddenly there's this new influx of money coming into the state that does allow new things to happen.

It's a state where, in the time I was director, there was a lot of collaboration because, still, money was tight and resources were scarce. When I was hired, there weren't many resources in the state. So I think that influx of federal money mattered, and then public money from the state, and to some extent from local government, too, once the City of Reno Cultural Commission was created and getting a small percentage of the room tax money.

Without much in the way of foundations, although those have increased in number a little bit, and without much in the way of major businesses other than gaming, which has not been known for its support of cultural organizations, that public money has been particularly important in Nevada. So you just

have this tremendous explosion of cultural activities during the past forty years. An example of creative minds at work is starting Artown. So there's a lot going on, but times are tight. We've all relied on public money, and public money in particular is going to be hard to come by in the next few years.

One thing that was notable to me in this context in both of the histories was the ups and downs of the National Endowment and how both economically and politically what's been happening has affected funding. Can you tell me how that's affected Nevada Humanities specifically?

Well, culture is a very political thing. We've had the culture wars going on for a long time now. I think it's kind of interesting. It's not that all critics want the Endowment to go away; they just want to be the leadership of the National Endowments. Those jobs have always been very sought after. NEA and NEH have been around a long time, I think they'll continue to be around a long time, but they are sort of a whipping dog.

The Arts have been far more controversial than the Humanities. The Humanities are less visible and seem more conservative. Consequently, they are less likely to get into trouble. They haven't funded outrageous art exhibits. I won't speak to the Arts because it's not my field, but the controversy did have an impact and the arts—the NEA and state councils—had to change the way they do business.

There has, right from the beginning in the nation's history, always been an argument about whether public money should go for culture, whether that's really an area that should be part of the private nonprofit world rather than the public world. But public

funding is well established at this point. Since NEH and NEA are part of the same legislation and people tend to confuse Arts and Humanities, within the organizations themselves they're always arguing for financial parity politically back in Washington—they are very closely tied together at this point. Their futures are entwined, no doubt about it.

Politicians understand history. They're making history. They understand presidential papers and things like that. So you can always find common ground for talking to a politician if you're in the Humanities, and the Arts might have a bit more trouble in that regard. The Humanities have not been without controversy. During the Ronald Reagan years, critics were probably right that the State Humanities Councils had a pretty liberal bias. In the early years the councils were supposed to bring the Humanities to bear on public policy issues. Well, they did tend to be pretty liberal in the way they approached those.

Ronald Reagan mentioned eliminating the Endowments. Before that, under President Nixon they had been well supported, and under Gerald Ford too. Reagan appointed Charlton Heston, a friend of his, to chair a committee to look into the Endowments, and of course they came out singing high praises for the great things the Endowment had done for museums and theater and all of that. But it took a while for the Endowments to recover the funds lost in the budget cut, during the Reagan administration.

Lynne Cheney was appointed Chair of NEH during Reagan's second term. She had excellent relations with people on Capitol Hill and built the budget right up again. Her husband, Dick Cheney, was a member of Congress at that time. So it comes and goes.

Contract with America, again, was going to eliminate the Endowments, and the

Endowments took a huge cut. NEH was cut 40 percent, but State Arts Council and the Humanities Committee fared pretty well because they had all this grassroots support. But, still, there was an impact.

The two Bush presidents were quite supportive of the Endowment. Clinton, of course, was very supportive, too. But then there was 9/11, when the economy in general took a dive. Audiences fell off, ticket sales fell off, all that sort of thing, and state revenues dropped precipitously. The legislature had appropriated a certain amount for Nevada Humanities, but the state didn't have it to pay out. In the end, we lost ten to twenty percent, as I recall, but gained back most of it. When you're relying on public money, there's always going to be that sort of up and down. Politics change, the economy changes.

With hindsight, I wish I had been doing more to cultivate memberships or donations. We were sort of lax about that. It was easier to get a chunk of state money or to get a \$50,000 grant than to cultivate individuals, but it's the individuals generally you can count on to be there when times get tough. We did certainly have a lot of supporters over the years, but you can only do so much. Staff was small and time was limited.

The political and economic ups and downs that have affected the National Endowment and the Nevada Humanities, what effect have you seen on cultural organizations and activities in general in Nevada?

I think we sometimes responded to bad times in challenging ways, so I'm not sure. I think there was a little bit of reinventing that went on with each crisis.

Let's see. What shall I say? One point I might make is that our staff has been always

very actively involved in programming, more so than administration. About 90 percent of our funding went for programs, which is good. It's a good figure; it means we had low administration costs. But because of the drop in funding over the years, we had less money to give away. We had more to give away in grants in the seventies and the eighties than we did in the late nineties or the past decade. Because we were dependent on the federal funding for the re-grants and for administration, and the funds didn't grow, but salaries did, the only way we could cut, usually, was the grant budget.

Our approach to a decreasing grant budget was to go out and get other money, private money. It was easier to get money for programs that we carried out than for donations that would be given to somebody else. So, really starting in the late eighties and then into the nineties and certainly into this decade, we really became, I think, an important programming organization. We did Chautauqua and we did book festivals and pretty much paid for them with funds that we raised inside the state through ticket sales, sponsorships, foundation grants, that kind of thing.

We continued to do more and more. After the Contract with America, we really came out of that period in a strong position. Partly because of the attacks, we wanted more visibility. A book festival, we decided, was a way to get more visibility. A couple of other things became our way, and, lo and behold, we were a little less dependent on federal funds and doing more.

I realize that you've been retired from Nevada Humanities since 2008. In your longtime involvement in the humanities, what's your take on what's happening now in terms of

both politics and the economy and the threats to defund the humanities? Do you think that that's a likely possibility?

Well, it's starting to look like Nevada Humanities will be able to hold onto at least a line item in the state budget, which gives them a chance to add more funding later on. The amount for now may be nominal. The state money was always dedicated to the Las Vegas office. They're going to have to come to grips with just how to divide up resources between the two offices.

We faced the loss of state money one time in the past, after 9/11, and then managed to squeeze through one last time. I was greatly relieved because it was going to be difficult trying to work through those decisions.

I think in different periods, there are different kind of programming that fits. After 9/11, everybody started book clubs. There was a real interest in reading books and sort of focusing inward. So in different periods, different kinds of programs seemed to fit.

The current chairman at NEH has a real interest in conversation and civil discussion. That's not the first time a chairman of NEH has brought that to the fore as something of importance, the idea of civil society and conversations that bring different voices to the table. But that's something that's never played terribly, terribly well in Nevada. Local history, Chautauqua, bringing in major speakers, the book festivals all play well.

Something else that I learned early on is that products are good to have. If you can hand somebody a book when you go back to Washington it seems to have more impact than a summary of funded programs. When I went to see the newly elected Governor Guinn about getting into the state budget, and we had *The Donner Party Chronicles* and *Stories*

from the Sagebrush and some videos we could place in his hand, he said to me, "Oh, I see you guys do something. You really do something. Now, give me some more information on the value-added benefits of the state's investment."

I've always thought that to have some products is not a bad idea. Although certainly we all believe that civic engagement and civil discussions and conversations are important, I suspect part of my success as a director was having maybe an innate political sense in being able to understand where people come from. I suppose I've always been personally more attracted to and interested in the more academic programming, such as the scholar who comes to town who really has something interesting to say, something new for me to learn.

At the same time, I know that businesspeople are going to look at things a little differently than scholars at the university. Politicians are looking at things yet differently. So I've always thought that perhaps our success and the reason we always had a fairly content board is that we had a good balance of different types of programs.

I think the Endowments will stay. I think the federal funding will stay. The state funding will probably come back eventually, and I kind of regret that I didn't more to build a base of donors because that would be helpful for Nevada Humanities to have now. We talked about that just as I was leaving. That was in the plans, more emphasis on the annual drive and memberships.

I also think that they'll need to look for new initiatives, rather than just continuing existing programs. I don't think Chautauqua has quite the spirit it did in the beginning, but that was partly because of Clay Jenkinson and what he brought to it. It has continued and they seem to have continued most of the

programs that were there. But ultimately, I think they need to look for something new and something that will excite them and excite the board. Of course, that's hard to do when you don't have any money or you're losing staff.

You asked how we felt about Reno when we first moved here and the cultural environment. There were a lot of things that were strange to us and hard to get used to—the aridity, for one. I don't remember, however, feeling all that deprived of culture, and it could be because I was busy being a student and had young children at that time.

The other thing that I think is interesting, since I've been around for a long time and can take a long view, is that we came here in the middle of that period between about 1966 and 1972 when the university and the town were growing rapidly. That was a period when lots of new faculty came to the university, not just in anthropology, but in history, philosophy, and literature. They came from large universities so often they came with lots of ideas about what they would like to see happen here.

I remember in those early years the English Department was doing a renaissance fair. The graduate students were presenting a foreign film series. This was a group of young faculty that had a lot to do with the cultural community. I think that is important to note, because this was also the period when a lot of the area's nonprofits and the cultural organizations were getting a start.

Being caught up in that ourselves and being part of making things happen is what I remember more than what wasn't here. We came from Chicago, and in Reno we were very close to San Francisco. We could just pop down to the de Young Museum for an exhibit of national treasures from Taiwan, or to U.C.-Davis for a concert of an Indonesian Gamelan Orchestra.

What was driving the growth of Reno at that time?

During those days, the university really was seen as the center of what was happening. Local people—especially the native Nevadans—saw the university as the center of the town and the most important thing about the town. I do think that all the young faculty who were hired during those days were probably important, as well as the general national environment of the period. It was when the Great Society legislation of the mid-1960s took effort and continued into the early 1970s as well. Republicans in those days were strong supporters of NEH and NEA, and I think all of that did have some impact on what was happening here, too.

Did the faculty that was coming here in the late 1960s, early 1970s stay beyond that period?

Well, the ones I'm thinking of did. I'm thinking of Frank Hartigan in history and Phil Boardman in English. Jim Hulse, of course, was a native Nevadan and was a little bit older, but he was always very active in humanities programs. There were Neal Ferguson and Ann Ronald.

All of those people were, in one way or another, involved in Nevada Humanities, and a lot more, too. The same was true in Las Vegas. There were a number of people involved with programs who were very active in history. Elizabeth Raymond is another one. Her husband, Jim Pagliarini, started the public broadcasting station, KNPB, here in Reno and was here until he was encouraged by the Minnesota station to apply for the job there. There are a lot of people who came here in their twenties or early thirties and are still here, and have been important to the cultural community all this time.

I did want to say that in the authorizing legislation, the justification for public funding for the humanities is the need for an informed and educated public, in order for democracy to thrive. I think it has always been important for us to keep that in mind and to be able to justify anything Nevada Humanities did in terms of NEH's public mission. The humanities are those disciplines that provide a perspective that is very important when you look at contemporary life and contemporary issues.

I do think that we kept NEH's mission very much at the heart of everything that we did. The current chairman of NEH and a number of chairmen in the past have really emphasized civic discourse. Nevada Humanities did a number of public forums over the years that were very successful and very good. Often our approach to civic discourse was a little more creative, like Chautauqua, but you still could talk about most of the programs that we did in terms of dialogue, discussion, and bringing people together. What is at the heart of public humanities programs is bringing together perspectives from these various disciplines in the humanities—the stories and experiences of people that can be found in history and literature.

One of the ways we had occasionally talked about public programs is living the humanities. An audience would see how a humanities scholar worked and interacted with an audience; Chautauqua is a good example of this. I don't particularly like the word "conversation" because I think it gets overused and has connotations that I sometimes don't care for. I do think, however, that engagement and civic involvement were always very much a part of what we did.

You also asked about my relationship with the board. I worked for Nevada Humanities for so long and so clearly had a successful

relationship with the board, and I think there are some reasons for that. One of my board members once said that she thought I was very good at reinventing Nevada Humanities. I think I was somebody who, as the times changed, could respond to those changes and respond to a changing board.

Maybe it was useful, too, that I didn't come from one of the disciplines in the humanities. One thing I recognized early in working with the board is that a board member with a background in English viewed things differently than someone with a background in history. I could appreciate the different perspectives that different board members had.

I could also appreciate the regional differences. In the early years, I did a lot of program development work in rural Nevada. I made a lot of road trips out there and got pretty well acquainted with people. I can think of a number of times when I was in situations where people would say, "Who is this person?"

Someone would say, "Oh, she's okay. She understands us. She's one of us." So I always felt pretty good about that. I could also appreciate southern Nevada and its insecurities when Las Vegas was very young and small. Later on, Las Vegas became very confident about who they were. There was a lot of energy in southern Nevada.

Something else that I recognized very early is that the north had a strong nonprofit orientation, and the south had a very weak nonprofit orientation. Early on, though, you did have government money going towards culture. I also recognized early on, just by looking at the composition of the board members, that the rural members tended to be longtime Nevadans. Occasionally among the people from Reno would be a native Nevadan, but they tended to be transplants

from the Midwest. In southern Nevada, they tended to be transplants from the American south, New York, or Boston. Their own histories brought a different perspective. I think understanding the board members and who they were, the differences between the regions of the state, and the differences among the disciplines, was fairly important.

I also seemed to have a talent that not everyone else had: I don't know if I was ever surprised by the decisions that the board made. In the early years, they were mainly acting on grant proposals, and they continue to do that. I always knew what their vote was going to be—always. I don't know why; I just did. I could always anticipate it. To the extent that I was involved with program development—I started out as a program officer—I could advise grantees well because I knew how the board would evaluate their projects. Other staff members were often surprised by a board's vote.

I could anticipate the programs that they would, as a group, approve and like. I also think that, while I didn't have any set agenda myself, I always understood the importance of leadership. The board would decide, ultimately, the directions we would take, but I was always ready to present them with good ideas for them to act on. I would always bring the right kind of background information to board meetings so that the board wasn't just discussing things all over the place, but could be fairly focused in the meetings and in the decisions that they made.

Would you say that you had more interaction with the public than individual board members had with the public?

Certainly we wanted the board to be out there talking to people about the importance

of the work that we did or to let us know if they knew of people we should contact or work with, or had suggestions. They were very good, though, about taking a hands-off approach to grants. When it came to developing grant proposals, that was the staff's job. When we brought those grant applications to the board, we did not take a position. It was then the board's job to act on them, to discuss them, to evaluate them, and to vote on them.

I can remember in the early days there were one or two situations where, after a board meeting, word got back to me that board members had been talking about the board's decision: "Oh, well, they turned it down, but I was for it." I quickly made a point of saying, "You can't do that." When the board discusses grant proposals, that is confidential. We have a public record. The minutes are a public record if anybody ever wants to see them. The minutes must always state why you've accepted a grant or why you've turned it down. It should be the staff's decision to contact people and have the conversation about the grant. We simply can't have board members talking to grantees and saying one thing when my letter might say something else, and yet a third person says something else. For the most part, they were very good about that, though.

I think for the board, too, over the years, just about everybody enjoyed serving on the committee. One of the things they really liked about it was a statewide sense that they got out of serving on the board. A lot of people in Reno don't know people in Las Vegas, and vice versa. They've not been to rural areas, but we would get them out to rural Nevada for some of our board meetings. We'd periodically get out to Smith Valley, Yerington, Deeth, Eureka, or Tuscarora.

What was that like, choosing meeting locations, cultivating board members, and maintaining a good relationship with all the board members?

Well, actually, we had a rather small board. A lot of the state humanities councils have twenty-five or thirty members, but we kept ours to fifteen members for a number of years. That was partly because of the distances in the state. If you looked at nonprofits here in Reno, a lot of them would have twenty or thirty members, but they would all be local and tied to various businesses. We were a bit more constrained in that, at least initially.

Half of our board members were to be people who distinguished themselves by virtue of their accomplishments in the humanities, whether they were writers or scholars. Those people tend not to be good fundraisers and things like that, but can be very good at developing programs and responding to grant proposals.

I think right from the beginning the board met four times a year, and then there was an Executive Committee that would meet monthly. We would normally rotate our meetings back and forth between Reno and Las Vegas. Every year or two we would schedule a rural meeting as well.

I think now there are twenty or twenty-one members. In 2000, we expanded the board. Most of the board members over the years have had a strong background in the humanities. They are not necessarily scholars, but they are college graduates. They usually feel pretty compatible and develop a great deal of respect and friendship among themselves.

Tell me about the relationship between the state councils and the National Endowment for the Humanities. How do changes in the NEH affect the state councils?

Well, it's changed a lot over the years. At first, really, the directions came from Washington D.C., although it was always a granting situation. Right from the very beginning, the first funds that the Nevada Humanities Committee received were in response to a call for proposals. A committee was formed and they wrote a grant application to NEH. That laid out their plan for how they would respond to and meet the directives from Washington.

As different chairmen of NEH came along, it changed a little bit. As I recall from the early days, and this was when I was a program officer rather than the executive director, the reporting requirements were pretty extensive. NEH really had a hands-on approach and the directions were coming from Washington.

That changed slowly after a period of time. Still, back in the 1980s when I was director, every two or three years we had to write an enormous proposal to NEH, listing every program, giving a description of every program, and a description of the state. These proposals were sixty or seventy pages long, and when you figured staff time and making multiple copies, we were probably spending \$15,000 every time we would do that. It was formula funding. Rather than related to quality of the program, the formula for the distribution of grants to the state councils was written into the legislation and based mainly on population.

It wasn't really until the 1990s that that changed. Then, in the late 1990s, the proposals were replaced with five-year reviews and an annual compliance report that provided numbers of programs in each congressional district and audience figures. It was a matter, I suppose, of the maturity of state programs, and the state programs saying to NEH, "Look.

We've been around a long time. Why are we being treated this way?"

It was also in that period of Contract with America, when the importance of the state programs was really recognized by NEH, because we had grassroots support and could mobilize people in support of NEH. It paid off. There were a number of members of Congress over the years who had been on the board of the state humanities councils and knew the value of what we did.

Can you tell me about the Oasis Conference? What was that conference about, when was the first conference, and who was involved?

I believe the first one was held in 1987. We held them in three consecutive years—1987, 1988, and 1989. The idea for the Oasis Conference came out of meetings that occurred perhaps a year or so before this. There were five of us who were getting together on a regular basis just over lunch or in somebody's office to talk about our common interests and concerns. Most of us who were getting together were receiving federal funding. This was during the Reagan years when funds were short, so there was a lot of interest in collaboration to stretch resources further.

Also, we were all fairly new to our jobs. At this point I had become director in 1984. Bill Fox was the director of the Nevada Arts Council and had maybe been in his job for a couple of years. Ron James had been named the state historic preservation officer. Scott Miller and Peter Bandurraga were in state agencies—the Nevada State Museum and the Nevada Historical Society, respectively—but also shared with the rest of us a statewide orientation, and they had offices in southern Nevada too.

Bill Fox gave the name to our group—the IGOV Group. We were all working statewide and had some similar interests, focuses, and issues of funding. We had been meeting regularly, and out of those meetings came the idea to develop a statewide cultural conference. Before that, we and the State Museum had been involved in supporting a statewide museum conference, so this was broadened out to be a statewide cultural conference.

The five of us worked at putting together a program. We all had lots of other organizations we were working with, so all the museums and all the libraries in the state became part of this. Of course, libraries had always had a statewide library conference. Staff and board members from all of the museums, all of the libraries, all of the arts organizations, and all the preservation groups came together. Some of the people in rural Nevada were working in all of those areas.

We pooled our resources so we had some funds to help pay for some travel costs. We held it the first year in Carson City, the next year in Las Vegas, and then the third year in Carson City again. It was just incredibly successful in bringing people together statewide and to help them see the commonality of what we did.

The other dimension of Oasis that was rather interesting is that we all involved our boards in it, too. The boards from these five organizations got together over lunch. We planned our board meetings to coincide with Oasis. It turned out to be very powerful, very meaningful, and very useful.

Out of it, to everyone's great surprise, came a legislative study. The legislature in the interim years always does these legislative studies and it's usually on something like taxation. They actually did an interim study

on cultural affairs. The key partner for this, because of the Oasis Conference, was this IGOV group. The rest of them were all state agencies. We were the one organization that wasn't a state agency.

The important part for us is that it was actually written into the report that Humanities should receive some state funding. We never received a lot, but it was very important at the time. Another consequence, although this took several years, was that they ultimately merged the other IGOV agencies. The Arts Council had been an independent agency in the Governor's Council, as had the State Museum and Historic Preservation Office. Eventually, though, the state created the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Of course, the other thing that grew out of Oasis was the Commission on Cultural Affairs, and this is a very innovative, very exciting thing for the state. It took two legislative sessions before it actually functioned in the sense of giving away funds. That was partly because of issues related to bonding requirements. It was a technical point that had to be fixed in the bill.

Originally, we had hoped funding could go for programming and things other than bricks and mortar. Partly because of the bonding requirements, though, the money could only go for bricks and mortar. Part of the requirement was that there would be a plan for how the historic buildings would then be used to further arts and humanities in some way. A couple of historic schools were renovated and became museums or art centers.

There is now a book, *Nevada's Historic Buildings: A Cultural Legacy*, by Elizabeth Harvey and Ron James, about the NCC legacy, and there is a comprehensive report

put out by the Historic Preservation Office. Dozens and dozens of historic structures were saved because of that legislation. It was so successful after ten years that they renewed the legislation and increased the amount from two million dollars a year to three million dollars a year.

The commissioners all are the chairmen of Humanities, Arts, Historic Preservation, Libraries, and the other one is Museums. Actually, I think Historic Preservation and Museums share a board member now. One of them may represent Tourism.

So the commission runs independently of the Department of Cultural Affairs?

Yes.

Is there overlap in terms of who is involved in both?

Yes, the legislation lays all that out. Actually, it is Ron James' office—the Office of Historic Preservation—that oversees the grants. Theoretically, all of the directors are staff for this. The chairmen of our boards were the commissioners and the directors were staff. It is actually pretty much all handled by Ron James's office because the projects are for bricks and mortar and they are the people who understand that. Theoretically, the Arts and Humanities could, and, to some extent, do work with the grantees to give them advice and help in developing plans for their structures.

When was the Department of Cultural Affairs created?

It was about ten years ago. It was the late 1990s. Doug Mishler who worked for

us for a short while in the late 1990s left our employment to become the director of the Department of Cultural Affairs, a job that he did not hold for very long. Dale Erquiaga was involved in that too. It must have been about maybe 1998 or 1999.

What was the Nevada Humanities' relationship with the Department of Cultural Affairs?

It was always very informal. When we did start getting state money, the first time it was just a direct appropriation. Then, the humanities appropriation became a line item in the Arts Council budget. It was really our choice where, and through which state agency, we wanted it to go. It seemed to me at that point that we had the most flexibility in working through the Arts Council because they operated more like we did than any of those other organizations.

We were also trying to increase the appropriation, and one year I think they gave us \$200,000 as a separate appropriation, but the line item was still at \$10,000. They took away the line item, which displeased us immensely. It took a long time to get back into the budget as a line item. For the next few years, it was just a direct one-shot appropriation. It was usually rolled over into the omnibus spending bill in the final days of the legislature.

It was about four or six years ago that we did get it put back as a line item in the Department of Cultural Affairs. The DCA always recognized it as just pass-through. The relationship was pretty informal and based on all of us knowing each other and having worked together for a number of years. We've never had to deal with state government in the way that other state agencies have to. We would go to Carson City during each legislative session and make

brief presentations about our work. We would usually take young Chautauquans with us, which was usually pretty effective. Once we started developing the Online Nevada Encyclopedia, particularly with the visual effects that we could do, that was also always very appealing to legislators.

We had a marvelous interaction one year between Queen Elizabeth and Senator Raggio, Queen Elizabeth was one of our young Chautauquans, Alex Newman, who now works for *USA Today*, who was very sharp. [laughs] She was talking about power, legislating, governments, and that sort of thing. It was really a lot of fun.

Once the department and these relationships were formalized, what effect did it have on Reno culturally?

I don't know that it had much effect on what was happening in Reno at all. The state bureaucracy was growing. They needed a way to be more efficient and to have one spokesperson in the governor's cabinet for all those organizations rather than each organization represented. It was interesting that all of the agencies in the DCA probably had more contact with Nevada Humanities than they did with each other, except during the Oasis Conferences. Oasis fell apart in about 1990, and partly for economic reasons. It was one of those periods when the state revenues dropped, and the State Museum and state agencies felt that they didn't have the resources to continue with Oasis.

We have always worked closely with museums, with Historic Preservation, and with the arts. The arts and history museums haven't always worked that closely together. The Humanities tended to bridge all of those things. They provide context for historical artifacts, for performances, and for visual arts.

When Michael Fischer became the head of the Department of Cultural Affairs—that was a couple of years ago—he had worked very closely with us and hadn’t worked that closely with any of the other organizations. This was a plus for us because he was very supportive of the work that we do.

Does the Cultural Affairs Department itself do any programming?

No, it’s strictly administrative.

How much money is available through the state for cultural programming?

I know our funding from the state was always very limited, and the Arts Council probably got five or even ten times as much as we got. They were a state agency and they were very effective in lobbying over the years. The Historical Society and the State Museum have always had some private money to support what they do and foundations set up on the side. For the most part, Historic Preservation and the Arts Council, other than their federal funding, rely strictly on state funding. Since we weren’t a state agency, we were never in a very good position to tap state funds. We did remarkably well when you consider the overall situation, I think.

For an intermountain western state, Nevada has probably done quite well, although certainly Utah has a reputation for being very supportive of cultural affairs. I know if you were to talk to Susan Boskoff, the director of the Nevada Arts Council, she would feel that they certainly could use more. They’ve managed to, more or less, hold their own during every downturn of the economy, until the current one. They often do reasonably well at bumping up the budget during the better periods.

What obstacles do Nevada Humanities and other cultural organizations face in fundraising and programming?

As the state has grown, this is an opportunity, a challenge, and perhaps an obstacle. There is more and more happening, so there is more and more competition for audiences and for grants. We did some strategic planning right before I retired, and there were a couple of things that jumped out at me. We did a little economic analysis, and for the state, the economy basically, other than gaming, is really very small businesses. A couple of foundations have been started, but you don’t really have the longtime wealth in this state that you have in other places. Fundraising really is a challenge, and it is for all of the organizations, not just Humanities. We’re just in there with the mix of everybody else.

Also there is more and more going on, and for the younger generation you have to think of new ways to reach them. A lot of people are busier and busier, so they have difficulty finding the time to go to programs. The question is, what do you do about that? You take your programs where people are gathered for other reasons. You use the new media, social networks, and all of that more and more. I think Nevada Humanities is starting to work through some of those issues. Those are some of the challenges. Of course, with the poor economy right now you have to think smart.

One of the things that we started was the Online Nevada Encyclopedia. We got it started during good times, to be followed by very bad times, like 9/11. The economy improved a little bit, and then there was this bubble and crash with the real estate. They have kept it going, but we moved into that as very naive people. It was a great idea, but putting it in

place and dealing with the technical issues and problems was more of a challenge than we expected. That was one project that was meant to address some of the changing technology, new ways to meet people, and new ways to preserve information.

Are there any advantages that cultural organizations, and specifically Nevada Humanities, had being based in Nevada?

Well, I always thought it was very neat to be a Nevada organization and based here. I thought it gave you a lot of flexibility and a lot of room to be creative. One thing our board always recognized is that programming on Nevada history and Nevada peoples was always important because of the number of people who are new to Nevada and don't have a sense of place. The state, historically and traditionally if you go back thirty years, didn't have the resources and the scholars to really do much about documenting the state's history.

I've always thought that you had a lot of creative people here, a lot of people with imagination, and a lot of people who knew how to do programming that really was specific for this state, that could be unique and unusual in that regard, not just borrowing something from someplace else, but doing something new and different.

As with the Oasis conference, people in Washington and people from other states were in awe of what we were doing. I remember Alan Jabbour, who was the director of the Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and was one of our speakers the first year, saying, "You guys are doing the sort of stuff we should be doing in Washington and elsewhere, but nobody is."

For Chautauqua, too, we took a different tactic. The Great Plains Chautauqua was

totally dependent on money from the National Endowment for the Humanities. As things started changing at NEH, and as directors and boards changed, Great Plains Chautauqua went away. Ours continued in part because we had so much grassroots support for it. We organized it so that the funding and support would all come from the community. So, after twenty years, it is still going. The Boulder City Chautauqua is still ongoing. Chautauqua is in the schools and in all kinds of places.

We also, during the 1990s, did those special programs that focused on Nevada topics: Nevada in the Nuclear Age; Asia in Nevada: First Steps; Water and the West. Even though the Asians have been a major part of our population and very important in the nineteenth century, there was very little out there, and nobody here was really focusing on contemporary issues with China.

The program on water in the West happened during those drought years, so it was a particularly meaningful program. We've done a lot of things that were different, such as starting the Young Chautauqua Program, which won a national award. Again, people are just amazed by that program, and it has spread elsewhere and had quite an impact. I think we've done a lot of things that have been unique, and those are the things that we're probably most proud of. They're very much Nevada products.

This is just an aside and not the most important thing I could talk about, but I had been asked to write a little piece on land use in humanities films. This was back in the early 1980s for a publication done by the Federation for State Humanities Councils. The Federation is our professional membership organization of all the state councils. I had written a little bit about a film we did on the MX Missile Project. I was surprised to read this again. The

film was put together by a physics professor, Russ McNeil, at UNLV, and we were basically funding some of his time to allow him to do this. He was working with the Public Broadcasting station, KLVX, in Las Vegas.

We showed it around the state as part of public meetings. It was broadcast by commercial stations statewide. It was picked up by PBS stations in adjacent states. It was aired nationally by PBS three times in one week. [reading from article] "More interesting than the public showings were the private uses to which it was put. Engineering firms (such as Boeing), Air Force officials, and state planners all made use of the film."

As part of that, we did a publication in 1980 called *MX in Nevada: a Humanistic Perspective* that had contributions from ten of the university scholars looking at the military presence in Nevada, national defense strategies, and a number of things. Doing something like that was something that people really rallied around. It was really fun to do and very meaningful. I think the record for Nevada Humanities is just full of examples like that that I could talk about.

In Nevada, it was so easy. It is such a small state, despite the geographic vastness. It was easy to work with various university departments and with Public Broadcasting. I think Nevada was just a wonderful place to be able to do cultural programming. Of course, the Cowboy Poetry gathering in Elko is well known. A number of cultural organizations were involved with getting that started.

The other thing that was interesting about the MX controversy was it was the first thing that really pulled together people from all over the state. The ranchers were against it, the environmentalists were against it, and rural populations and urban populations were against it. It brought this coalition, which has really continued to today. The Cowboy Poetry

gathering, interestingly enough, although people don't think of it in these terms, is a place where those people all come together and still continue some of those discussions about a common interest and love of the land. Even though they might have slightly different interests and perspectives, there still are commonalities that they have as westerners and Nevadans.

Can you tell me about the grants that Nevada Humanities has made to other organizations in the state?

Over the years we probably gave, on average, about sixty grants a year. If you figure over the thirty years I worked for Nevada Humanities, thirty times sixty—that is a lot of projects. A lot of those projects had multiple programs. One that comes to mind that was always a favorite, looking back a number of years, was Children's Literature Open Door to the Humanities in 1978. They brought in ten prominent authors of children's books and they sent them all over the state. Each of those authors was here for about three days, so they sent them on the Bookmobile to Lone, to everywhere in the state. The authors were just amazed by it. It was a program that had some legs. It was so big and tiring that I think they only did it one time. There was a group that continued to hold a workshop on children's literature for years afterwards, though, through Extended Studies at the university.

At one point we gave \$1,000 research stipends, too, for work on Nevada history. A number of those projects developed into books. Not many of the state councils funded research, but again, we thought it was important in a state like Nevada.

We gave a number of grants over the years to museums to develop exhibits. Media was

important for us, too, as a way to reach larger audiences. We usually funded small amounts for films, but those grants were important to independent filmmakers. Usually the subject needed to be something about Nevada, like this MX film I just mentioned. We did a number of projects on rural life over the years, and on the Basque community.

We did a lot of conferences over the years and a couple of festschrifts, one honoring Charlton Laird in English, and another one honoring Warren d'Azevedo in anthropology.

Jean Ford developed a series of forums over the years on water issues that she took all around the state. She developed some printed materials that were good guides for those kinds of discussions.

An early grant to the Art Museum in 1977 or 1978 was a nice collaboration between the medieval and renaissance studies program (a new program that was started at the university), and the Art Museum. Marcia Growdon was the director at the time, and she had a PhD from Stanford in art history. Growdon, Phil Boardman, Frank Hartigan, and many others did this wonderful program on medieval culture and brought in objects from other museums for an exhibit, did a film series of morality plays, and brought in performances on early instruments. It was just wonderful.

We funded a number of projects on Indian reservations over the years. We did programs on James Joyce and brought in several poet laureates over the years, particularly to Las Vegas. We did oral history projects in Boulder City. In the mid 1970s there were a number of programs on women's issues. One was on women and creativity, for example. A lot of these were very interesting and a lot of fun.

I guess more in the 1980s than at any other time, we were funding quite a few programs

and traveling exhibits. There was a series of three traveling exhibits on women. One was Women and Work, Women and Family, and Women and something else.... This project was kind of the forerunner of the Women's History Project. We did an exhibit on blacks in Nevada, based on Elmer Rusco's work, and one on Asians in Nevada based on Sue Fawn Chung's work, and a number of films over the years. A lot of these we put together to create a resource center, so for a while we were in the business of distributing a lot of films and exhibits around the state.

Can you tell me about the distribution of funding in Reno versus Vegas versus rural Nevada?

Over the years, if you were to think of it in terms of population, rural Nevada did better than anywhere else. There was always a sense, both from our urban members in Reno and Las Vegas, that programs in rural Nevada were very important and they had fewer resources there. Otherwise, it was usually pretty even between the north and south in terms of numbers.

Now, if you think of population, you could think of southern Nevada as being underserved. I mentioned all of those non-profit organizations that you have in the north, and that was partly the reason that we tended to get as many proposals from the north as from the south. Occasionally the issue "Is Las Vegas getting its fair share?" would arise, but generally, the board was not all that unhappy with the distribution of grants.

Was there any difference in the types of proposals you were getting from different areas, in terms of topics or even how they wanted to use the grants?

We were doing some oral history and preservation work statewide. Certainly there was as much interest in southern Nevada in their earlier history, so there were a number of exhibits and media programs that we did about Las Vegas. We did a number of programs on showgirls and gaming in Las Vegas that we didn't have here in the north, but some very interesting ones all in all.

There was a very, very active public broadcasting station in Las Vegas, so every year we had a strong proposal from Nevada Public Radio, KNPR, down there. Up here we tended to get strong proposals from Channel 5, KNPB. One of the differences was that up here the radio station was connected with the university and part of the university budget, but Channel 5 was set up as an independent broadcasting station. In Las Vegas it was just the opposite. They had a very dynamic radio station that was licensed as an independent station. The Public Television station, KLVX, was part of the school district and part of their budget.

TV up here and radio down there were starting from scratch raising their budget every year. They had dynamic founding directors, Lamar Marchese from KNPR in Las Vegas, who just retired a couple of years ago, and Jim Pagliarini from KNPB up here. Those were strong programming partners for us.

Over the years, we did a number of interesting radio and television programs. At some points we actually partially paid for staff who did weekly radio programs, interviews with people coming to town, and public affairs commentary.

Did you fund individuals?

No, for the most part, we did not ever fund individuals, although the grants to

organizations could include funding for individuals. The one exception was the \$1,000 research grants. Those are the only grants that ever went to individuals. We were strictly funding projects, and the projects grants went to nonprofit organizations or government entities, like the State Museum, a school, or a library. The grantees had to be bona fide organizations. These could include social service organizations, educational organizations, and art organizations. They could not be a for-profit group. If we gave sixty grants a year, there might be a few cases where one organization got two grants, but not very often. So really we were working with fifty, sixty nonprofit or government groups every year. Now, they might have been back. The public broadcasting station in Las Vegas was pretty much there with a grant application every year, but we had a lot of change among grantees over the years too.

I can imagine that some organizations counted on a Nevada Humanities grant every year.

You would be surprised. Not that many did, really. I can remember we gave a grant one year to WARC, for example, and they did a film on stereotypes and discrimination. They looked historically at how the mentally ill and how the disabled were treated two or three hundred years ago, how this had changed and evolved, and how it tied in with various religious views. It was a really great program.

We did a film of a deaf poet at one time. It was an interesting one, too. Some of the films were done by independent filmmakers. To qualify, they had to work with an organization and the organization was the recipient of the grant.

They would administer the money.

Right. If it was a rural film, it might have been the Western Folklife Center, for example, that was the grantee. It might also have been the public broadcasting station if they were collaborating with them, and the public broadcasting station was then going to distribute and show the film.

What was the application process like?

We didn't have any set length, so we did sometimes receive proposals that were twenty or thirty pages. Interestingly enough, you can usually size up a proposal in a couple of pages, and that is really what the board preferred. You really have a pretty good sense if the grant applicant knows what they're doing, if they're organized, and if the ideas are good and solid. Really, if you had a good idea, the project was well planned, you had humanities scholars involved, and they had worked with you on the proposal, then you had a pretty good chance of getting it funded. The proposal didn't need to be more than a few pages.

The scholars, if you were using local scholars, generally were known, so you didn't need to attach a twenty-page CV; you could give us one page or a paragraph. If you had outside scholars as part of your program and we didn't know who they were, you needed to tell us. We needed more biographical information or a full CV.

We were fortunate. We always had a very smart board and they were pretty savvy about sizing things up. They could do it pretty quickly. So the application did not have to be prepared by a great writer. Even people who were inexperienced in grant writing, with a little help, could usually put together a proposal that was fundable.

Was there a set amount that you could give?

Yes, pretty much. I remember one time there was a media project where we had spent about \$20,000 or so, but over multiple years. \$10,000 tended to be the maximum that we gave. We were talking about relatively small grants. We gave mini-grants which were \$1,000 or less and fell within parameters that were already established. For small, basic programs, particularly in rural Nevada, that were just pretty basic—getting a speaker out there, doing a film series, traveling an exhibit—simple mini-grants were all that was needed.

There were a number of fun programs over the years, too, where people actually developed scripts. Jean Ford and Jim Hulse worked on a couple. Based on the research he did, Jim Hulse, now an Emeritus Professor of History at UNR, discovered that Nevada had come very close to passing legislation giving women the vote back in the 1860s. They took that research and developed a little skit about it that traveled around the state.

There was another skit. Was it Sara Bard Field? There was a suffragette who came through Nevada and toured in across Highway 50 by automobile. They reenacted that tour across the state. People had a lot of fun with a lot of these programs.

Were there any changes in who was asking for money, what they were asking for, or the type of programming?

Well, there were some shifts. Some of this was partly driven by NEH. In the early days—mainly the five years that the organization was around before I was hired—the focus had to be on applying the humanities to public-policy issues. That switched and there was a strong emphasis on folklore for a while because the chairman at NEH, Joseph Duffey,

appointed by President Carter, had an interest in that. It was a chance to move into new areas.

By the time I was hired, the focus was strictly on the humanities. We had certain categories of funding, and we were basically following the categories that NEH had. They had museum programs, education programs, media programs, and research programs. During those days we had a program called Humanist in the Library. We would send a person out, usually with a master's degree, to a rural library where they stayed for five months and developed programming. That was one way to reach out to rural audiences. Each of those funding categories had slightly different sets of guidelines.

Over time we tended to throw out categories and just fund programs. Basically, regardless of the category, there were about three criteria that stayed the same over the years, and one was the centrality of the humanities. The humanities had to be central, scholars in the humanities had to be involved in the planning and implementation of a program, and the grants had to be awarded to nonprofit organizations.

In the 1990s, with Chautauqua and some of these other projects that we did, there were calls for proposals—we talked about re-grants—that would fit in with themes. When we were programming on water in the West, doing a lot of the programming ourselves, there were still a lot of grants that we gave for research and public programs related to that topic.

What was the balance between programming that Nevada Humanities did itself and all of this other programming that was funded, and did that change over the years?

It changed dramatically. During the 1970s and 1980s, we were mainly working with

grantees. We were sometimes doing things that we wanted to do ourselves, but we were always working with another organization that was receiving the grant that was funding the program. So in the early years, it was mainly program development work. Actually, in a sense, the Arts Council still operates that way. Mainly what they do is give grants. It was an interesting way to operate. If you had good ideas yourself and were out there in the community making contact with a lot of people, you could do lots of wonderful things.

We really did a lot of exciting programs. Actually, it was William Bennett who emphasized the classic and text-based training. Lynne Cheney's interest was in teaching standards and what she called the "parallel school," by which she meant a whole range of educational opportunities through museums, exhibits, television, and other outlets.

At one point those were the directions from Washington: you get the money, you give grants. That changed during the 1980s when we were encouraged to take what money we had, and spend it the best way we could. It was more the states'-rights era than direction coming from Washington about how you should operate. The attitude was, "Well, here, let's just see what you can do. If we like what you do, we'll reward you for it. If we don't like what you do, well, you know, forget about the money." So there was a bit of that during the Bennett years and the Cheney years as chairmen of NEH, when there was an emphasis on merit, on text-based programs, on the classics and getting back to the basics, and on more education programs in the schools. This was the period when they were talking about teaching standards and things like that.

Once we got into programming ourselves, it meant the staff was spending less time on program development, so we were a bit more passive about the grants that came to us. Staff time got taken up more and more with the programs that we were developing. Part of developing programs meant also, rather than being the recipient of the federal funds that we then gave away, we became fundraisers. So the federal funds continued to be used to cover basic operating expenses and also to cover grants. We then became fundraisers, to some extent, to cover the cost of the programs that we were doing, such as Chautauqua and the Book Festival.

The programs that we did ourselves really put us on the map far more than the grants we were giving. When you're giving grants, the audience tends to identify with the organization that is doing the program, and so we were a step removed. We could have our poster displayed saying, "This program is funded by Nevada Humanities." Really, though, the recognition for Nevada Humanities came more from programs like Oasis, the book festivals, Chautauqua, Young Chautauqua—any of the things we jumped into ourselves.

We saw Chautauqua as a way to do interesting humanities programming. It was more than just the performance at the tent that evening. It was really meant to be a way to encourage thought and engagement. We would think carefully about the topic each year and which historic characters could best speak to that topic, bringing a number of different perspectives and voices to bear. Of course, there is the interaction with the audience as part of Chautauqua through asking the scholar questions—either asking the scholar questions out of character or asking the historical figure questions while the scholar was in character.

We also always did book discussions in the library, conversations the next morning over coffee, and coffee with the Chautauquans every morning. We often did public forums on issues. The libraries and the bookstores were partners with us in all of this. We did teacher institutes.

In the early years, we did bus tours as part of the public forums. We always did a *Chautauqua Reader*. Sometimes it was about twenty pages with essays about the historical characters and the issues that were involved. We always put together annotated reading lists, and sometimes did a film series as part of it. A lot of thought went into it and there was certainly a lot of context and a lot of depth. Chautauqua is an interesting way to get a really fast history lesson, but there was a lot of depth in what we did. It wasn't somebody who just put on a historic costume and gave a point of view.

When did the Chautauqua program begin in Reno?

It started in 1992, so this year, 2011, will be the twentieth anniversary. Every year there would be five to seven different characters. We once figured there had been about 125 different historical characters presented. In terms of the scholars, some have developed a number of characters. I just had a conversation with Doug Mishler, who is on his seventeenth character at this point, D.W. Griffith, whom he is developing for the Oklahoma Humanities. We've had a number of local people who really are very good at this and have gone all over the country with the characters that they've presented.

Initially, we were rather interested in focusing fairly specifically on Nevada and Nevada history. The second year we did Chautauqua was quite interesting in particular

because it was when Sue Fawn Chung, a Professor of History at UNLV, developed Mrs. Loy Ford. She was a Chinese woman who lived in Tonopah, and was one of the first Chinese women to own property. Cheryl Glotfelty from the English Department at UNR did Ida Meacham Strobridge, who had written three books about her experiences in Nevada and was an early writer of the environment and sense of place.

Kathleen Worley, a Reno native who now teaches theatre at Reed College, did Mrs. Hugh Brown, who wrote about her experiences in Tonopah. We had Edward Lovejoy, played by William Chrystal, who lived in Wabuska, but was the son of the famous abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy. It was maybe that year we did Frank Crowe, the engineer who built Boulder Dam. Clay Jenkinson either did Thomas Jefferson or Meriwether Lewis. The theme was the Western experience.

We soon found that it was hard to do too many characters with a Nevada focus because you didn't have enough people who left enough of a text record to develop a full-fledged Chautauqua character. Part of the idea, too, was that once people developed Chautauqua characters, if they were local scholars, we could use them in the schools and in other programs. We had a resource there that we could use for humanities programming through our Speakers' Bureau. We moved on to the millennium with Rousseau, Jonathan Swift, Maimonides, Chaucer, and Mahatma Gandhi portrayed by K.B. Rao—all kinds of interesting people.

How did Clay Jenkinson get involved, and how long he was involved with Nevada Humanities and the Chautauqua program?

I had heard him speak at one of our national conferences in Washington, D.C. He

was doing Thomas Jefferson. I simply went up to him and asked if he would come to Nevada.

He said, "sure." The first time we brought him here, we had him travel from Las Vegas to Reno, doing projects in rural communities on the way. He also did Thomas Jefferson at the state prison, which was an interesting experience.

While we had him here, we did a fundraising reception at Marilyn Melton's home, and Clay did a little Thomas Jefferson for the crowd. Two of the guests at that event were particularly important. One of them was Bob Blanz, who was the CEO of Nevada Bell. He had a summer home at a Chautauqua site in upstate Michigan, so he knew about the historic Chautauqua and was quite intrigued by this program.

One of our board members, Proctor Hug, a Justice in the 9th Circuit Court, was just about to hire his interns. He got to talking to Clay and found out that his wife was just finishing law school. He encouraged her to apply, and that is what brought them to Nevada. Before we started Chautauqua, Clay and Etta had actually moved here. Having Clay as a resource gave us the confidence to try Chautauqua and see how it would work here.

Nevada Bell got us a \$25,000 grant from Pacific Telesis, so we had the funding, and we had Clay. We were off to a great start. The first year was pretty well attended. We had advertising signs on the back of buses, and we put signs in people's yards. Clay and I went out and spoke to every service club that would take us. We set up a tent at Rancho San Rafael Park, and it was pretty well attended. Of course Clay was a hit. He did John Wesley Powell that year with his arm tied behind his back, and he was a great hit. Fred Krebs, who was a very experienced Chautauquan, did William Mulholland, who stole the Owens Valley water for Los Angeles.

We had a couple people who were marginal. The person who did Mary Austin didn't really like Mary Austin; that was clear. She read a paper, which was not what we had in mind. Despite some weaknesses, everyone loved it, including Pacific Telesis and Nevada Bell. There we were and it just continued to grow. Nevada Bell remained one of our important sponsors for the first ten years or so, and Chautauqua just grew bigger and better.

Clay's last year was my last year as director, so that would have been 2008. He moved away from here several years before that. We continued to work with him as the artistic director on the themes and the choice of characters until that very last year. Through 2007, we continued to hold it under a tent at Rancho San Rafael Park, which I think for both Clay and me was part of the charm. We hated to let that go, but it was a lot more work than being at Bartley Ranch Hawkins Amphitheatre. It has continued, though.

The audience has changed over the years. I noticed when I was back last year—I used to know a lot of the people there—this time I knew fewer people there, but it was still holding its own. Changing location had an impact. There were a lot of walk-in people when it was at Rancho San Rafael, so I think you lost some of the people from the Northwest, but picked up other people. It still seems to be holding its own and going strong. The Young Chautauqua program has survived some changes in leadership, too, which has been good.

Tell me about the Young Chautauqua program and how it developed.

Well, this was, again, a very Nevada-grassroots thing. That first year there was a teacher institute and some of the teachers

were so taken by Chautauqua, they started a Chautauqua program in their school. This was Sparks High School. That next year we had a couple of high school students who participated in Chautauqua doing some morning programs for children. So then there were other kids who saw it. At one of the how-to-do-Chautauqua workshops, one of these kids who was in junior high at the time, happened to be the son of Susan Tchudi. He raised his hands and asked if kids could do this.

Mara Brosy was one of the students. Chris Tchudi was one of the students. So there were a couple of enthusiastic young people, and their parents, to some extent, grabbed a hold of it. The daughter of Lynn Brosy, who is a dentist in town, was quite interested. For the first year or so, she was one of the primary people who organized it. Then Susan Tchudi became quite involved. Neal Ferguson, who was the dean of Extended Studies, also became quite involved. His daughter, Sarah, was also a Young Chautauquan. So it just grew and grew. They would have fifty to sixty students who had started the year, but finished with maybe thirty because it really is a very rigorous program.

Susan put together a Young Chautauqua Handbook that she later expanded, and then put together a second handbook, which was a guide for community leaders and teachers on how to do Chautauqua. She also took Young Chautauqua programs to a lot of schools and libraries, and did a lot of teacher and library workshops. She was in a fair amount of demand as a speaker for talking about this as a methodology for engaging young people in very effective learning.

These kids are amazing in terms of what they learn, the research they do, the techniques that they learn for storytelling and performance on stage and for taking

questions from the audience. One of the ways they learn is that they do their research and then start performing, and people ask them questions. Pretty soon they have to do more and more research. Some of these kids have been truly amazing.

The Young Chautauquans went back to Washington for one of our national lobbying events called Humanities on The Hill, so over the years they came to the attention of other humanities councils. They also received the award called the Coming Up Taller Award from the President's Commission on Arts and Humanities.

That program has spread all over the country. You find it in interesting places. You find a lot of teachers using it in classrooms. You say Chautauqua in Nevada, and most people know what you're talking about. The Young Chautauquans, before they could go under the big tent, as they used to call it, had to do three public performances. They were out contacting service clubs, asking, "Can we come? Will you let us do a performance for you?" It has just been out there and it is pretty amazing.

Have the Chautauqua programs received any awards?

Truckee Meadows Tomorrow gave us an award one year and that was related both to Young Chautauqua and to the Great Basin Book Festival, which we were doing at that time.

Tell me about the Book Festival.

During the Contract with American period, we were doing Chautauqua by then, but I felt we needed yet another high-visibility event. I knew that there were a couple of states that had started book festivals. I knew

that there were some writers here within the state who had been invited to book festivals in other states, Shawn Griffin being one of them. So I began to think about it and pulled some people together. We decided this would be a good idea to do.

Joan Bradley was on our board at that time and she had some connections with the E.L. Cord Foundation. We were able to get a \$25,000 grant from the Cord Foundation to kick it off. We pulled together all those groups we had worked with, like the state library, the county library, and the departments on campus, got it organized, and did it.

The first year, Robert Pinsky had just been appointed Poet Laureate. The Poet Laureate program is through the Library of Congress. Through the state library and their connection with the Library of Congress, we were able to get in touch with him just right after he had been appointed to that position. We got him lined up to be our keynote speaker that year. He was a great hit.

That was the year we published the *Donner Party Chronicles*. The book festival was a way to announce its publication, promote and publicize it. We worked closely with all the bookstores in town, so we had a book fair and booths set up. A lot of nonprofits set up booths as well. We did it downtown in Wingfield Park. The city was very involved in the book festival because they wanted to encourage people to use the downtown parks.

We used the churches—the Episcopal and the Methodist Church—on either side of the river as locations for readings, workshops, and forums. It was a great way to pull people together and to do a wonderful event. We kept it going here in Reno for about six years.

Again, just like with Chautauqua, we saw it as more than just bringing a bunch of writers into town. We thought about themes and issues that could be explored and how

we could use people for outreach. One year we had several Native American authors and we sent them out to the reservations to do programs. We sent them out to Owyhee Duck Valley Indian Reservation, north of Elko, and down to Dresslerville Washoe Colony, outside of Gardnerville.

We did a series, too, using World War II veterans who were here in town and writing. One of the Tuskegee Airmen, Col. Charles McGee, who went into the black schools, did some programs also. Elizabeth Norman wrote about oral histories of nurses who had been at Bataan in the Philippines. The University of Nevada Oral History Program at this time had just published their book of oral histories with Nevada veterans of World War II. So we were pooling all of those things as one of the focuses in the year 2000.

Over the years, we did a lot with any Nevada author who had a new book. We tried to highlight them. We did a lot with Western literature over the years. We had a number of wonderful speakers. Our keynote speaker in 1998 was Robert Hughes, the art historian, and we used him for forums sponsored by the E.L. Wiegand Foundation and the city of Reno. The forum was called "What Makes a City Great." Panelists talked about city planning and that sort of thing.

In 1999, we had David "Mas" Masumoto here to talk about cultural tourism. He is a peach farmer in the Central Valley. He was on the California Council and was a guest speaker for a national conference funded in part by NEH, NEA, and the White House on cultural tourism. He was one of the most engaging speakers, everyone agreed. He was really quite wonderful. A peach farmer might seem like a strange choice, but he had written a wonderful book called "Epitaph for a Peach," and he offered authentic agricultural and cultural experiences at his peach farm.

We had Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate, as our keynote speaker one year. Normally, with the book festivals, we had several prominent writers like Annie Proulx and Anne Lamott. The list of speakers goes on and on. Normally we would have about twenty-five speakers and then two or three prominent speakers with a lot of name recognition, like Robert Stone. We also had speakers who were not so well known but who our local writers knew and who were writing about the things that were important for this community to hear about. We were always working with the local writers as well. It was a lot of work and a lot of fun, and the Vegas Valley Book Festival continues to this day in southern Nevada.

Was there a specific reason for the shift to southern Nevada?

It is my regret that we dropped it, but I couldn't disagree with the board's decision. We started the Book Festival in 1997 and it ran for six years. After 9/11, the economy took a dive and funding was kind of tight. We were doing Chautauqua in the north and south and book festivals in the north and south, and we had a small staff. We had four people in the Reno office, but that included a secretary; an accountant; Steve Davis, who was the programming person; and myself. In Las Vegas we had a one-person office with part-time clerical help. That was a lot of work to be doing, even with committees, networks, and passing a lot of the work on to other people as well. The board felt we really couldn't do that much. We didn't have the staff time. We were going to raise more money, but guess what? That was not a time when you could raise money.

They decided that Chautauqua, at that point, was so well established in the north that we should continue with Chautauqua here.

For southern Nevada, because the English Department was really building up their program in creative writing and a number of new writers were living in Las Vegas, it was decided that we should develop the Book Festival as the flagship activity for southern Nevada.

Las Vegas is a different community, so the Book Festival has been a little different down there. It has had its ups and downs, but they have kept it going and it is important for the community down there. Up here, because everything could be so compact downtown along the river, it really had a nice feeling to it. We had always worked very closely with people in Las Vegas in putting together the Book Festival up here and involving their writers. People like Richard Wiley, who was one of the founding members of the writing program at UNLV and involved with the PEN organization, had tremendous contacts with writers. He was really helpful to us in identifying writers and lining them up. He always said it was a shame for us to drop the book festival up here because it had the kind of feel that we were not going to be able to create elsewhere. I think he was right.

People were disappointed, but we didn't really have the money to bring in the kind of big-name people that the audience wanted to see. Sundance Bookstore, ASUN Bookstore, and the University of Nevada Press were right there with us, but Barnes & Noble and Borders? Forget it. Their revenues were dropping and we lost them as vendors and as partners. Anyway, it was too bad. It was wonderful, though. People still remember it very fondly.

We did replace it. We did want to keep some literary things going in the north. We started a program called Books and Authors. We were at least bringing in a couple of prominent writers every year. We brought in

Bill McKibben and a Palestinian American writer named Naomi Shabib Nye. We brought in Khaled Hosseini, who drew a thousand people. Again, with each of those people, we did programming around them and forums of one kind or another.

One of the programs we were getting started when I left and did for only two years—with my retirement, it was partly organized but not totally organized, and I guess they felt they couldn't carry it on at that point—was called Food for Thought. We brought in thirty or so people who were experts on contemporary issues. People signed up for dinner and sat at a table with a designated host, and then they could have a conversation on everything from energy use to terrorism.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think is important to include in the interview?

Well, just because the awards reception took place a couple of weeks ago, in March 2011, I would say that a tremendous honor for me is that when I retired they established the Judith Winzeler Award for Excellence in the Humanities. They just had the reception and it was wonderful—in part because one of the awardees was Sundance Bookstore. They had been so involved in the Book Festival and the store has become such an important place for writers to come together. I feel like that community of writers and that engagement of writers in the community that was started with the Book Festival is something that lives on through Sundance Bookstore.

It was just wonderful to see the people who attended that reception, knowing that I had something to do with helping to encourage the connections among all of them. It was a great job to have for all those years.

Now I'm pleased to be retired and not to have to worry about state budgets and changes in Washington.

Something else that pleases me is that Nevada Humanities is the only state council with a written history. The first 19 years are covered in Wilbur Shepperson's book, *Sagebrush Urbanity: Nevada's Humanities*, and the next 18 years in my own *Sagebrush Urbanity II: Nevada Humanities 1990-2006*. I was able to draw on these publications to refresh my memory of some of the events and programs we have touched on here.

PAT ZIMMERMAN

Allison Tracy: *Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?*

Pat Zimmerman: I was born in Sparta, Wisconsin. I was born two weeks after World War II ended. My father was on his way to Japan to be in the landing force when they dropped the bomb, so our family always thought it was a good idea to drop that bomb. I lived in Wisconsin until I was in second grade and moved to Illinois from there where I lived for thirty-five years. I grew up there.

I worked for Illinois Bell Telephone Company for fifteen years, until the first divestiture of the Bell System. I transferred to New Jersey the year before, when the actual divestiture took place, which was where the headquarters were for AT&T. I worked for AT&T on the divestiture as staff personnel. I worked there for ten years, and they offered me an early retirement. I'd started very young—your age and your years of service had to add up to thirty—and mine added up to twenty-nine and a half. I was forty-four

years old. I said, "Sure, I'll take retirement." [laughs] So, I retired. I had to take a six-month cut on my pension, but those people have had to pay me a pension for the rest of my life, and I kind of like that.

I was living in New Jersey. I liked New Jersey but I knew I would never retire there. It's just so very expensive, and I wanted to live somewhere where some of my family lived. At the time, I had one sister in North Carolina, one in Illinois, and one in Reno. I'd lived in Illinois for thirty-five years, so I thought I had paid my dues there. I didn't really want to live in North Carolina. I figured they'd be burning crosses on my yard sooner or later. I couldn't agree with the way they still treat blacks. I couldn't live like that.

I liked the West when I came to visit my sister out here. I felt very much at home here from the very first visit, so I always thought this would be a good place to retire. I called my brother-in-law and I had him look at my financials. I said, "Can I afford to retire?"

He said, "Yes, if you're willing to live on this amount of money the rest of your life."

“Okay.” So I retired. He was a contractor. I asked him if he’d build me a house.

He said, “Go find a plan you like.”

I went to the library in New Jersey. [laughs] I looked in books and magazines and found this house plan. I sent it to him and said, “Can you build that?”

“Sure.” I sold my house in New Jersey and I moved out here. That was twenty-one years ago. I never looked back. I’ve never regretted it. It’s been a very good move for me.

I was forty-four and retired, and I really didn’t think I wanted to go to work again. I’d been working since I was eleven years old. I was tired. [laughs] I was ready for a break.

So I thought about what I enjoyed doing most in my career, and I decided I enjoyed teaching. At the telephone company, I was a trainer and trained service representatives. So, I decided I really enjoyed teaching.

At the time, the first Mrs. Bush was in the White House and there was a big push for literacy. I just can’t imagine life without literacy, without being able to read. It is just so important to me. So, I decided to volunteer to be a literacy instructor. I also have always been interested in politics, so I started volunteering for people that I was on the same wavelength with, which led me to some very interesting and fulfilling things in my life.

Then, I started specializing in ESL [English as a Second Language]. I’m talking about tutoring adults. I was tutoring and having classes with particular Asian people. Most of them were studying at the university for their advanced degrees. I was editing their thesis and dissertations, and they said, “You know, you ought to go to school and get a degree.” Because I didn’t have a degree.

I said, “Well, I really don’t want to go back to work. I kind of like not working, but I guess I could do it for the fun of it.” I’ve always been very interested in education, so I said, “Okay,

I will do it if it’s fun, but if it ceases to be fun, I’m not doing it anymore.”

I went back part-time to start at TMCC [Truckee Meadows Community College], and I had just a few credits from college that I’d gotten along the way, and I loved it. From the first day of the first class, Western Traditions, I came out and said to myself, “We’re going to study *The Iliad*. Oh!” I was just hooked. I absolutely adored it.

My teachers were wonderful to me. They *love* old students. They’re so nice to you. [laughs] I was older than they were. Many of them became my friends. Many of them became speakers at OLLI. Yes; I call in favors. I graduated with, a general studies degree—what I called, my Jeopardy degree—little bit of this, little bit of that.

I went on to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno] and took a few classes. Then, my adopted Chinese daughter—we kind of adopted each other—was getting married, so I took a year off to plan her wedding, which was wonderful. I began having some health problems, and I decided I just couldn’t do the hills at UNR anymore. I was on crutches and all kinds of things. I thought, “Well, maybe it’s time to join ElderCollege.” I had a friend who was very active in ElderCollege, so I knew about it, although I’d never been to anything. That’s how I came to ElderCollege.

Can you tell me about the schools that you went to growing up and what you remember of them?

I went to kindergarten. That sounds like a big deal, like, “who cares?” but I discovered that the rest of my family didn’t. At the time, I guess I was the first one that had a kindergarten, education. I remember learning all the versus to Frosty the Snowman and painting.

My father worked in the grocery business, and he was transferred very frequently. Often we were in a town for maybe two to three years at the most, and then we would transfer. So I started school in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin, and was there for kindergarten and first grade. By second grade, we had moved to Monroe, Wisconsin. I was there for one year. From there, we moved to Oregon, Illinois. These were all small towns; they still are. I went to school in Oregon [Illinois] from third grade through high school.

With the advent of email, I'm on email almost daily with friends from high school. We've planned reunions over the years. We renewed acquaintances on email and Facebook, believe it or not.

From there, when I graduated high school, I went to Macomb [Campus] Western Illinois University for just a quarter—it was on quarter system—because, frankly, I just didn't have enough money. So, I left and got a job at the telephone company.

All three of my sisters have worked for a telephone company, though not all Illinois Bell. One worked for Illinois Bell. All three have worked for Dekalb Ogle, which was a little telephone company. I was the only one who had never been a telephone operator. I rather quickly became a management employee and always had the opportunity to work during strikes, and I learned how to be a telephone operator during strikes. That was quite an experience.

When I originally went to the university, my goal was to be an elementary teacher. Of course, I went to work at the telephone company and that changed drastically. I became very much interested in business.

In 1964, civil rights and equal rights for women were just going wild, and I really wasn't part of all that. I'd grown up in a very small town and never knew a black person.

In the town I grew up in, there was just one couple, a husband and wife, who were black, and I never knew them. He drove the school bus for the Catholic school, and I wasn't Catholic, so I never knew the man. It was just a small town and there wasn't work for black people, so they didn't come and live there. We lived twenty-five miles from a larger city, and there were many black people there, though.

When I went to work at the telephone company, that was the first time I ever really met black people. I didn't have any particular prejudice because I didn't have any reason to have a prejudice, but I was and am staunch supporter of civil rights—not enough that I was marching—but I also became a staunch supporter for equal rights for women.

I come from a family of four girls, and we're very close in age. I'm the youngest. My oldest sister is six years older than I am. We had many of the same experiences, but I was the only one who didn't marry and really made a career. My sisters worked off-and-on in their lifetime, but they weren't what you'd consider career women *per se*.

I think, because of that, they were home raising children and so they were looking at equal rights for women in a whole different light than I was. As my sisters and I discovered as we've gotten older and talked about those things, we just were coming at things from different directions. That really made a big dent and change in my life.

When I started working at the telephone company, women had very little hope unless you became a chief operator and got to the Traffic Department, which is now Operator Service. Those were women, but that was about it for women. There were entry-level jobs, and they got very little beyond entry-level jobs. That all changed drastically in my lifetime of working. It didn't change to where we ever had a female president of AT&T, but

I hope that that's going to happen someday. By the time I retired, women were in much more responsible positions, and they were much more comfortable with that.

When women first started getting responsible positions, it was dog-eat-dog. They were afraid of losing them, so it wasn't necessarily pretty. That isn't that way now, though, and I'm really proud of these women.

You mentioned your dad. Can you tell me about your mom?

My mother was a good mother for girls. It was a good thing she had girls. She liked curling our hair; she liked dressing us. She had been a beautician before she was married. She was a seamstress most of her life. She was always involved in girly kinds of things. She'd worked in a women's dress shop, doing alterations. She had a real sense of style and taste.

Both of my parents had a really nice sense of humor. My mother was great at picking out cards—just a really dry, funny sense of humor. She didn't pick the sweet little hearts and flowers; they were just funny cards. She was always fun. You'd say, "You want to go somewhere?" and she had her purse and was ready to go.

She was raised in a different time, though. At that time, women had families and children, and they stayed home and worked. She did stay home and raised us until I got into school. Then she started working outside of the home. For us, it was a good thing because we all had responsibilities in the home which was good training for us. I never felt neglected. I just thought it was good training.

It was a situation where, when Dad was transferred somewhere, we went there. It was never "Oh, no. We aren't going to do that," or,

"I don't want to do that." He was considered the head of the household and you supported that. She was very supportive of him.

What are your parents' names?

Margaret is my mother's name and the woman never had a nickname. It was always Margaret, which is kind of unusual. My father's name is Herbert, and he was always called Herb by everyone except his mother, who called him Herbert.

Growing up, do you remember any cultural activities? You moved around a little bit, but do you remember arts organizations or theater when you were younger?

Going way far back to when I first start remembering things was when I was about four or five, and lived in a little town in Wisconsin about twenty-five miles from Madison. I remember every summer this sideshow thing. It really wasn't a circus, but it was kind of like a vaudeville tent show. It was a song-and-dance show, and I remember that.

I also remember going to lots of movies. In those days, in small towns, there was one movie theater. The main picture would be on for a couple weeks. These were probably what they would consider B-grade theaters. Boy, we went to the movies. We went to the movies every Sunday afternoon, if we wanted to or not. Now, I don't remember that we didn't ever want to, but it's just very much in our memory that we went every week. That was kind of what we did. Our folks sent the four of us to the movies every week. I was born in 1945, so this was, 1949. I remember some movies that really go back, like *Showboat*, for example. That's an old movie, but I remember when it was

first shown in the movie theaters. I don't remember everything that well, but movies were a big thing.

At that time in my life, things were centered around going to church; I was Lutheran. My parents were not particularly interested in culture that I can remember.

When I got a little older and moved to Illinois, events were certainly centered around church, and in our family, when you were in fourth grade, you joined Junior Choir if you could sing or if you couldn't. You were in fourth grade; you joined Junior Choir. I don't ever remember being asked if I wanted to join Junior Choir; I just joined Junior Choir. I was in Junior Choir until I was in Senior Choir until I graduated high school. In grade school and high school I was always in choruses and choirs.

We lived in a very small town. At that point in our dating life, going to a movie in Rockford or Dixon was a big deal. Dixon was fifteen miles away; Rockford was twenty-five miles away, and they had choice of lots of theaters there, where Oregon [Illinois] still had the one little tiny theater. Now, they don't even have that. It's the way things went, though.

We also had a Coliseum in Oregon [Illinois] which is a building owned by the city, and they have whatever is going in the world there. There would be stage shows there. There would be 4-H performances—just anything that happened.

We lived right across the street from that building when we were growing up. There was, of course, no air conditioning at that time. It was the 1950s, so they'd always have the doors swung wide open. We would go over and stand in the door and watch whatever was going on. I guess that was part of our culture too. [laughs] Those were the kinds of cultural things we were involved with.

Our Junior Choir sang on television one Christmas. That was a big deal for us. Those are the kinds of things I can remember.

Did you have any expectations or impressions of Reno? Did it fit or not fit any of those preconceived notions that you had?

Oh, yes. My sister who I was visiting had lived in Richland, Washington with her family, which is an area that is very much like Reno. It's desert, because that's where they took plutonium from uranium to make nuclear bombs. It's out in the middle of nowhere. I visited there previously, so I had an idea what deserts were like.

As far as the idea of the gambling and the glitzy, I'd visited Las Vegas many times. In fact, I fell in love with slot machines. I'd never seen a slot machine until I was an adult going on cruises. You get out beyond the four-mile limit and they take the covers off the slot machines, and I just fell in love. What a wonderful thing. [laughs] I thought that was pretty cool. That's when I started going to Las Vegas once a year for a weekend.

That's where I first learned about gambling, although, to me, you cannot live in Nevada and be a big gambler. You're just going to end up on the skids. As it is now, I usually only go into the casinos for the restaurants or shows. If my sister from Illinois is visiting, then we'll gamble a little bit, though I'm not much of a gambler anymore. I very rarely gamble now.

I love desert living. I love the climate here. I lived in places with really heavy humidity, and I love the lack of humidity. Oh, I think that's wonderful. I love the blue skies. It makes me happy. I didn't realize how much sunshine makes me happy until I moved here. It doesn't have to be hot—that isn't what inspires me—but just having the light makes me happy all throughout the year.

I also like the people here. They could very well fit into the Midwest. In my way of thinking, Midwestern people are very down to earth and very honest people. Chicago aside, as a rule, the people are very honest; they call a spade a spade. It's just the way it is. Sometimes we're too honest with people and can hurt some feelings.

I liked it from the first time I ever came here. I like to see the mountains. I like to go in the mountains. I think that's very neat. I'm not a skier. I'm not an athlete—never have been, never will be. I enjoy being around that kind of thing, though.

I love Reno. I love the fact that there are Broadway shows and casino shows. I love the Symphony. I have tickets for that. I love the Art Museum. I think we have a wonderful art museum for the size of our city. It's just terrific. I really do take part in all of those kinds of things.

Through my life I have learned to love live theater, anywhere from neighborhood productions to Broadway. I fell in love with that probably as a young adult, and I did go to many of those things.

My first big professional stage production was in 1967 when I was sent into Chicago by the telephone company to go to the Assessment Center, and *Fiddler on the Roof* was on. I got tickets for that, and I have just adored theater and *Fiddler on the Roof* ever since. I do go to the theater as much as I can. I certainly did that when I was in the East. It was one of the things I enjoyed doing.

My friends and I went to Broadway all the time. We went to TKTS for the half-priced tickets. In the ten years I was out there, I probably only paid full price for tickets twice. I still resent that because one was *Cats* and I never thought it was worth it. The other was *Les Misérables* and that was worth it.

But you can say that you've actually seen Cats, though.

Oh, absolutely. I saw so many shows when I was out there. I also went to the museums. I only lived forty-five minutes from my house to Broadway. When you're by a city, you don't count the distance; you count the time, because the distance doesn't make any difference.

It could be four miles and it would take you forty-five minutes.

It could take forty-five minutes. In New Jersey, everything took you forty-five minutes wherever you went. The one winter my friend Beth and I decided that we knew we wouldn't be there for all of our lives. We'd all been transferred out there by the telephone company. So we thought we would make good use of our time, and we went to a museum every Sunday and we spent the whole day there. These are world-class museums. To go to MOMA [Museum of Modern Art] and to see all of the Impressionists and really learn to love them.

I've traveled a great deal in my life and, in my travels, I went to the Louvre and many of the great museums of the world. If you see a great master, you know it's a great master, even if you've never studied art.

When I went to TMCC, I took an art appreciation class just because I wanted to have more education in art. I guess that was another reason why I'm so happy about our Art Museum here and what it does for this area. I think they just do wonderful things for us. There's a great deal of culture, and I'm very proud of that. I really do take advantage of that, and I know our OLLI people do. They love it.

You talked about being involved in ElderCollege. What is the mission of ElderCollege, and what were your first impressions of it?

I have always been the kind of person who, from the time I was in grade school, was always the leader in something. We were starting Student Council; I was the president of Student Council. I was the president of my class for the first two years of high school. After that, I became president of the Student Council. Whatever I've been involved in in my life, I've always ended up as president or project chairman, which usually earned the money. [laughs] I guess some people are just that way.

When I went to ElderCollege I decided I was just going to sit back, watch, and enjoy it for a while, and I did the first semester. I joined spring semester of 2005, I believe. I went to a number of the presentations. The goal of ElderCollege at that time was really education. It still is the goal, but as we grow, we add other things to that. There's always been some culture involved in ElderCollege, and certainly in OLLI, but the biggest goal was education, and that's what sparked my interest.

The main reason I joined ElderCollege was for the Lifescapes class. The Lifescapes class is on writing your memoirs. I also am a person who's really interested in history; it's kind of an avocation. I just assume everyone's as interested, and I'm finding out they really aren't, including my sisters. As I write my memoirs, they say, "Why do you care?" Or with genealogy, "Why do you care about these people?"

"Well, they're your relatives. Don't you care?"

"No." [laughs] "No, I don't."

"Oh, okay." I guess I just do. I find it interesting and fun.

There has always something that piques my interest at ElderCollege, and, now, at OLLI. I think that's one of the beauties of it. When you retire, you've gone through certain phases of your life, and as I keep telling our people, "If this isn't your time, when is your time? This is our time. Take advantage of it and enjoy it. You've raised your children; you've worked. You've sacrificed; you've done all kinds of things. This is your time to sit back and do what you want to do. When your kids call you, it's good for them to get [voicemail] and have to leave a message. Don't live their life. Live your life."

I think people who come to OLLI believe that. They want to expand their horizons. When you stop learning is really when you start dying. I find something new and exciting every day, and certainly in OLLI. That's what people tell us time and time again; it's so much more than they ever thought it would be.

What's particularly exciting about it is that I've always been really interested in history, but all of a sudden, we're talking about earthquakes and tornadoes. I'm finding that very interesting to study. When I was in college and had to study geography, I hated it. It was awful. It was just rocks. They didn't humanize things. They didn't explain why you do things. Those are things we've learned.

Of course, when I came to ElderCollege it was about two hundred and fifty people. Today it's over a thousand. At the time when it was two hundred and fifty people, sometimes we'd have ten people attending a class. Now those ten-people classes are usually fifty-people classes, and the twenty-five-people classes are now seventy-five-people classes. It's just the way it is.

Over the years we have tried to expand our curriculum and get a big variety of things instead of always the very small forty to fifty

classes. We now have well over one hundred classes every semester and lots of different opportunities.

I don't take country line dancing. People who take country line dancing love country line dancing. They fight for spots in country line dancing. That's wonderful.

I'm not an artist. The people who take the watercolors classes—that may be the only class they take at OLLI—love it. First of all, they love the instructor. Secondly, it's the best bargain in Reno because they pay \$45 a year for their OLLI dues, and most art classes are \$25 a class. Well, we give them eight classes for \$45 a year and another hundred classes that they'd like to go to. That's a huge difference.

That's something that is such a surprise to people. Reno is an area where people are moving in; seniors are moving in all the time. There is a big influx certainly from California, there's no question about that, but also from all over the country. A lot of times it's because seniors are coming here to be with their children at this stage of their life. They've found out that it's a hard thing to leave a place where you have a network of friends, but they feel they need to be closer to their family. I understand that. So they move to be closer to their family, but they're thinking, "I'm not going to have any friends anymore. I'm going to be living my family's life." We don't necessarily like that. We like a little independence. We like a lot of independence, actually.

That's what people find they can do with OLLI. They vote with their feet. They come to what they want to come to. They don't come to what they don't want to come to. It is such a reasonable charge. In fact, our OLLI is probably the least expensive in the country. It's \$45 a year for anything they want to take. Most OLLIs base their charges on certain classes, and they take classes that are six weeks

long and pay for each class. Ours just isn't that way, and we haven't had to raise rates at all since I've been there. At this stage of the game, we don't need to raise rates. We also are completely managed by volunteers. We only pay a part-time clerical staff.

We don't pay any of our presenters, and most places do. It doesn't cause us any trouble, though. Really good people come to us and volunteer to teach classes, not just members, but all kinds of people from the university too. They love coming to teach classes because we're a whole different audience. I told you how TMCC loves to have a returning older student. Well, so do all the professors from UNR. They will come to OLLI and tell a joke. For instance, they'll talk about Billy Beer and we all laugh. We think that's funny. We know what Billy Beer is.

President Carter's brother was Billy Carter, who was just a real hick. While his brother was president, he had Billy Beer. Now, of course, that's probably worth something. We know what Billy Beer is and [the younger] generation doesn't have a clue. These professors will say that. They just love teaching.

In fact, a couple years ago we were going to give Eric Rasmussen a semester off because he's been teaching for us for years, first with the ElderCollege and then with OLLI. We thought the guy would maybe like a semester off. He's such a well-loved professor. In fact, he got the award for the university system, not just Reno, but the university system this last year. He said, "Don't you want me to come?"

"Well, of course, we want you to come. We would love to have you come." He calls us his gray-headed groupies [laughs] and we are. We know about his family, his wife. He now has his wife presenting presentations. She's terrific. She works with DNA. She makes a bundle of money, but she's really

cool too. She's very nice. We've just become a part of their life and they've become a part of ours. They tell us any little news that's going on in their life. One of them's having a baby. He was telling us they were trying to have a baby, and now they're pregnant and they're real pleased about it. They just kind of keep us up to date. It's become a wonderful relationship.

You were asking about ElderCollege. What I was getting to is—the first semester I just kind of laid back and watched and enjoyed and came to things as I wanted to. We had an art series at that time called “The History of Impressionism from Monet to Van Gogh,” a six-part series. That was really neat.

I've just been to so many museums, and I wanted to learn as much as I could. I didn't used to like Impressionism, but as I've gotten older, that's one of the things I've learned to like. I think as you have more time to study things and really stand back and look at them... people are really interested in birds and things. We have big turnouts for those kinds of things. That was something else. As a young person, I was too busy making a living to pay a heck of a lot of attention to that. Now, I'm just really interested in it, and I find that's true with lots of seniors.

They asked me if I would run for vice president, and I said, “Oh, no. I just joined. I don't know much about the organization.” I think you just really need to know about the organization before you do that. With us, if you take vice president, it's assumed that you eventually become president.

You only have one person running; no one's ever running against each other. It's all volunteer, so you don't have people just beating on the door saying, “Gee, I want to do that.”

I said, “No. No, I just can't possibly do that. I don't know enough about the organization.”

Well, then LaMerne Kozlowski got a hold of me because she was going to be the incoming president. I didn't know her from Adam at the time. She said, “Oh, you're going to have two years, because the president is president for two years and then the vice president becomes president. You have two years to learn all about that.”

So, I did it. I became very involved with curriculum. So I've been really working on the Curriculum Committee, in addition to holding president and vice president offices ever since. So that's why I volunteered to do this, because I'm very much aware of the programs we've been doing since 2005. I'm very aware of them and have gone to almost all of them.

That's how I got on the board, and I've been on the board ever since. I'm just now in process of leaving the board because I think it's time to stand back. As soon as I agreed to work on the Oral History Project, I told them, “When that's over, I'll leave the board.”

Can you tell me about the changeover from ElderCollege to OLLI?

Yes. There is a changeover. ElderCollege was an organization in effect for sixteen years. We really had an opportunity to build on the best. It was a group of people. It was started by Neal Ferguson, who was head of Extended Studies at the time—he's now a history professor—and a few other people he talked with about it. It was considering ongoing education for seniors. It always was self-sustained by [member] dues.

The university gave us a place to meet, and we were under the umbrella of Extended Studies from the beginning and continue to be. We pay them some money every year to do our publicity and make our catalogs pretty. We give them the basic information. We've

really changed over the years. We now give them that information online. They designed our letterheads. So, that's part of our payment. We still get our offices without charge. We pay for some things, and the university pays for some things.

When I first came on the board, I met Sherl Landers-Thorman, who moved here from Orange County, California. She was going to be moving to Reno in retirement, and there was an OLLI in Orange County. She looked into things before she moved here, because she wasn't going to move here unless there was something for education. There was ElderCollege, and she was happy with that, so she came here. Sherl had become active at OLLI; I think she was on the board at the time. Because we didn't even know what OLLI was, she recommended we get involved with OLLI. She had a friend who was on the board there.

You don't just contact Osher and say, "I want to be an OLLI." You have to be invited to participate. We did some behind-the-scenes work and got invited to participate in OLLI. They asked us to change our name to OLLI. That was a requirement. They all are called Osher Lifelong Learning at, and ours is, of course, at the University of Nevada, Reno. We didn't know if we would get invited, because Las Vegas was already an OLLI.

Mr. Osher was limiting at the time. He had a lot of OLLIs in California, associated with a university. That was the second requirement; they must be associated with the university. He felt, and still feels, that the university has some obligation to seniors and that they need to provide some support to seniors.

The third thing that he feels is that members must pay dues and do things as a volunteer organization. You may hire people, but you still need to become involved as a volunteer because it becomes a part of you.

You need to take some responsibility, too. That was his idea.

Let me tell you a little bit about him. He's a philanthropist now, but he owned what has become Wachovia Banks. He sold that when he retired. He also owned Butterfield & Butterfield, the auction house. He sold that to eBay when he retired. The guy's got lots of money. The Osher Foundation has been sponsoring and giving grants to medical schools for a very long time.

His wife, Barbro, is an assistant ambassador to Sweden. She's Swedish. So anything they do in America they also do in Sweden. They support schools in Sweden as well as here.

He's from Maine originally, and he went back home and visited friends. Some of them were so active and alive and others and some of them were just old and sitting on the porch and dying, and he wondered why. He was asking friends who just seemed so alive, "What's going on? Why are you like this?"

They said, "Well, we have a thing called Senior College at the University of Maine."

He thought, "We need to do that." That's how the OLLIs began— as an organization would be associated with a university. They would take part in it and he would provide a little seed money to get them going.

We were very fortunate in that we had a very alive, well-working, well-run organization for sixteen years, and we were doing okay with our money. We certainly couldn't build buildings or anything, but we were doing okay, particularly for the membership that we had.

They asked us to change our name and to grow the organization from 250 to 500 in a period of three years, and they would give us a \$100,000 grant each year to do that. So that's why we changed from ElderCollege to OLLI.

Some of our members liked the very small organization that it was and were kind of happy to keep it that way. It was a mom-and-pop kind of thing. We had lots of potlucks and lots of social events. As we get larger, we just simply don't have the room. Now with over one thousand people, we can't have a potluck anymore. You just can't. If we have something big like that, we have to go off premise to do that.

We chose to develop the organization with the money. We put in smart classrooms in three locations, and they are very pricey. That's every bit as good as what they have at anyplace in UNR. They're state-of-the-art. Our speakers can use anything they want to use with our smart classrooms. It was money very well spent.

We also put in new computers. We teach computer classes. That's a real draw for people. It's been a real joy for me to see how many people—our average age is probably in the seventies—have probably never worked with computers in their lifetime and now want to work on computers; they want to learn how to use computers.

Our computer classes have to be pre-registered because they are limited, but those go so quickly. People care. They want to be able to talk to their grandkids. They want to be able to talk to each other. They want to be able to go online and look up all those things. They want to be a part of the information highway. They really do. I think that is wonderful for people in our age group. I think it's just terrific. We're in there pitching all the time.

We also changed all of the furniture in our building to put the tables on wheels, so they're easily pushed about, because we change the configuration of classrooms from just rows of chairs to tables and chairs, depending on what we are teaching. Upstairs at the Nelson Building we have a larger classroom that holds approximately seventy-five, and then

a smaller one that holds about thirty. It can hold thirty-five, but if you have the tables out, it's more like twenty to thirty. Those are for classes like Lifescapes and other classes where you want to have pencil and paper in front of you.

We also share the Laxalt Auditorium downstairs at the Nelson Building with other organizations. That holds up to about 125 people. More and more as we grow, we're filling it. Well, we aren't quite filling it yet, but we're getting really close. We've had a couple of times when we've just about filled it.

One of them, if you can believe it, is for geology classes. You think, seniors really want to know about geology? Well we have a terrific speaker who has volunteered to teach these classes, and he's just wonderful. He has a wonderful sense of humor, and he tells us so many things that we find absolutely fascinating. So we've filled that.

That's a good place to also have some of our music presentations because it has a stage. Some are more cultural kinds of things; some are dancing demonstrations. Ageless Repertory Theatre performs for us each semester.

We, determine where we're going to put classes by educated guess. It's really knowing about how many we had last time, because we sign in for every class. We keep that information and use it for developing classes. It's an educated guess of "Do we need Laxalt or can we do this upstairs?" It's kind of nice to do things upstairs because it's a little smaller and a little more human. Downstairs is just getting so popular because you almost always have to do it downstairs now, and people are getting to really enjoy that too. It's also a really good place to show our films, and we have a couple of film classes.

We also have some classes at the Redfield campus, which has been nice for us, too.

As Reno grows—and lord knows it's really grown out that way—the Redfield campus is kind of underutilized by the university. Unfortunately, it is a series of quite small classrooms. Most of them can only hold about twenty-eight. They do have one or two that can hold a little more than that, but nothing over fifty. We really can't put something that we would have put in Laxalt out in Redfield. It's been slow-going building classes out there, but this last semester we had several classes that exceeded the fire limit which we were really nervous about. So, we have to pre-register for those now too.

We have one of our film classes out there each semester and then one of them down at the Nelson Building each semester. Those are just really interesting classes too. These are conducted by people who are extremely interested in film. One was a teacher who built the film classes at TMCC, and he does the forgotten films. He's gone back to silent films. It's really interesting. He has so much knowledge.

The other man, the one who does it at Redfield, worked for the Academy Awards, and he has such a knowledge. I was really worried about them because Jerry is the one who's at Redfield, and he came to Larry's class, and Larry is another one of these who has been teaching ElderCollege and then OLLI for many years. The man schedules his spring vacation around us because he likes teaching. That's what's happened to some of these people. Then Jerry came to Larry's class and he just loved it. He just absolutely loved it because his interest is film. He offered to teach a class, and I was afraid that would be insulting to Larry.

We were trying to develop Redfield at the time, and I said, "Would you be willing to do it at Redfield?"

He said, "Yes." Well, those two have turned out to be best buddies. We now have their classes scheduled so maybe we'll have four to six weeks at Nelson and then the next four to six weeks will be at Redfield. They go to each other's films all the time. They just love to tell us all about it, and they're wonderful.

Pat, you were going to tell me about the endowment.

Yes, as I said, the Osher Foundation required three things of us, and the big one was that we grow our membership from 250 to 500 in a three-year period. We did that after a year and a half to two years.

Everything is recommended, and their board recommended then that we would get the million-dollar endowment. So, we have an arrangement with the university. There are certain things that the university is required to do for us, because Bernard Osher is nobody's dummy. He was a businessman and still is. [laughs] They weren't necessarily things that the university wanted to promise us, but they did.

So we have a million-dollar endowment and it's paid out to us at 50k a year; the interest is paid to us. We got that about two years ago. I was president. Now we just turned 1,000. We will notify the Osher Foundation of that, and we will most likely get a second million-dollar endowment because of that because of the 500 [memberships].

They probably won't give it to us immediately. What they usually do is to let you go another semester or two to see that you stay at that number or go above it. They don't want you to go below it. That's perfectly legitimate, and it's not a problem.

We are in a situation right now that I don't think we can stop. Word of mouth is our biggest boon for new members. We go

to some things such as the Senior Fest and Newcomers [Club], and we have a table. We also have a Speakers Bureau made up mostly of board members, because many organizations invite us to come speak. We tell them about our organization and we get a few people here and there, but probably the biggest growth for us has been through word of mouth. I just don't think we stop that, because we are the best bargain in Nevada, not just northern Nevada.

So that's what the endowment is. I feel really good that we have that behind us, and that's also a reason why we don't have to necessarily increase dues because we get that amount of money. And we live rather frugally. That's just kind of been our system.

I also wanted to tell you what our mission has become. It's very similar to what it was at ElderCollege, but just a little more. [reading] "OLLI is a member-directed volunteer organization that fosters intellectual stimulation, promotes new interests and personal development through academic pursuits, and provides a community in which to gather, get acquainted, and socialize." That's where we have parties and things of that nature because the interaction is just as important to seniors as taking a class is.

Right now is summer. We have a summer program for June and July. We are off in August, and we start registration again mid-August. In that period of time where people are not seeing each other on an ongoing basis, they really miss each other. The same thing happens over the Christmas holidays. We don't have classes from about mid-December—we're on the same schedule as the university—until mid-January. When we start in mid-January, those people are so happy to see each other. They're just long-lost friends. Those are good times. It's good to have time off, but they're just so happy to get back

together which is such a joy to see. We have a big Christmas party every year.

One of the things we do that's of a cultural nature is every fall we have Tea and Symphony. This is a program that we do with the Symphony Orchestra here in town, Reno Symphony; we have a big tea party. We're limited to 125 because that's all of the people we can hold by fire codes. It's one of the few times we dress up. The women wear hats. Oh, gosh, we never wear hats anymore.

We make the refreshments, usually. We make cookies and little tea sandwiches. Sometimes we'll have strawberries dipped in chocolate, and we serve tea. We have the tables divided so a member serves at each one. We serve the people at the table because we don't want elderly people walking around with a hot cup of tea. That's kind of a neat thing.

The people from the Symphony Orchestra just love it. We have someone come and perform for us each year. Last year we had Julie Machado, who played the bass. It's always a lesson and music. It's not just music, because we are an educational organization. It's educational as well as musical.

When we were getting a new symphony conductor, they were interviewing for the job for a year. They would come to Reno and go out and meet the public and so forth. Well, one of those people came and told us all about conducting. Now, since we do have a conductor, she comes every year, as does the executive director. It's one of their favorite things to do in Reno. It's just a fun thing for them and for us. It's kind of getting our culture on.

When we first started doing it, the Symphony Orchestra invited us to a dress-rehearsal practice. The people who had gone to the Tea and Symphony were invited to one of their practice sessions, which are by invitation only, so that was kind of a big deal.

That was fun too. That was a lot of fun. Now, so many of us have become members of the [Reno] Philharmonic that we don't even have to do that anymore. That has really helped their membership.

We also have a classical music seminar. That's an ongoing series of programs that occur every-other-week each semester. They've done tremendous educational things for us. They always have someone from the Philharmonic. They have someone from the [Nevada] Opera. They have someone from the Ballet [Nevada]. They have someone from all of these things going on in Reno throughout the year. They talk about their operas and so forth. It's really an opportunity to see, face-to-face, what's going on. They love coming to us too.

We get many professors from the university. In fact, I told you it's just not hard to get people to talk to us. They consider it, "Gee, I wish they would invite me." Sometimes they let it be known that they would certainly like to be invited, and many times I've had people call and volunteer. We've gotten some of our best professors by doing that. Some just volunteer, or if they don't volunteer, some of them contact us and ask to make paid presentations. We don't pay them here, though, so that ends that right away. I get those people from outside of Reno, because other OLLIs do pay.

A lot of the people teaching the classes are volunteers. How are other ways that you get people?

Oh, we're sneaky. Our people are so very active. We do have a curriculum committee and it's a committee of about ten to fifteen people. They're people who kind of get out in the community and go to things. They see things, and they will ask people.

We have it broken down by subject matter, such as arts. There would be one or two people who work on arts. There's also music, dance, and theater, and there are people who work on that. There are also groups for history, literature, memoir writing and so forth. It's going to different things and inviting people.

We also have a lot of cooperation from the university. Different groups within the university will say, "We really need somebody for science. We need to have a better representation of science." Remember, we keep track each semester of the subjects and how many people attend all the different subjects. We try to keep a real variety of things. So, we'll ask them for suggestions.

Phil Boardman has been another one of our real mainstays from the university. Phil has been involved with ElderCollege and OLLI for years. I always joke about him because he could stand up and read the telephone directory and we'd get a full crowd. He's just not at all pretentious. He's just so common and ordinary, and kind of downplays everything. They love him. He's wonderful.

Well, he said to me this last semester, "You know, my wife would be a good presenter. She used to present at ElderCollege." I didn't know about his wife and someone who had been around longer than I had said, "Oh, yes, she used to." Somehow she fell through our cracks in the exchange and different people on the Curriculum Committee. So we've got her lined up now too.

So they'll squeal on each other. "She'd be a good one to teach." The same thing happened with Eric Rasmussen—"Well, my wife would be a good one to give a presentation on something." That's another way we get people.

Sometimes, particularly during election years, we will do politics or government. It's really usually government. We'll also do a

lot of history and politics. We will have one or two big presentations where all of the people running for office come and make a presentation. So we get politicians. The mayors love to come and talk to us, and they're great.

Whenever there's an election, we try to get the political science professors from TMCC and/or UNR, and both of them have been there many times. There have been others, too, but those two particular always fill the room. We just know those people fill the room, and they have such interesting, wonderful things to say.

From a cultural standpoint, most of that is people who have gone to different presentations. For example, we've had *Feet of Flames*, a film about the Irish dancers; Harmony Grits Chorus; History of Performance of Bluegrass Music; How to Choose and Present an Opera; How to Organize a Concert; How to Write a Symphony; Last Tango in Reno, that was about dancing, all different dances; New Horizons Band; Opera presentation, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Mikado*.

Reno's Golden Age. That's when we had Mel Shields, and that's when we first got introduced to him. He's just terrific and knows so much.

Scottish Country Dancing. One of the members of that group is the daughter of Joyce's, of the president.

We call in our kids. We call in all favors. Sweet Adelines; Spiritual Blues and Gospel Music; Sierra Nevada; Billy Leica.

Then the Sheep Dip. We've had a couple different things from Sheep Dip. The Rubber Chicken String Band, Music in Nevada; Silver State Accordions; Vintage Players. These people just love coming. The Vintage Players are TMCC. They may lose that because of budget things.

I mentioned Ageless Repertory likes to come. Another one that just loves to come—they're normally paid and we don't pay them—is Cowboy Poetry and Song. They just love to make presentations to us.

A number of our members are extremely talented along these lines. Many of them have been teachers and professors. We have people from housewives to medical doctors, and they all are happy to share what they know. Many of them become teachers. One of the ladies that you interviewed has done a number of things for us, Bach, *B Minor Mass* by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Anne Marie has also done many of these. Go for Baroque Revisited. Yes, we have just kind of a little sense of humor about this.

Then another one of our members has done a series of recorded jazz programs. He has quite a following, maybe twenty to twenty-five people. They're just right there every time he does it. He's had Jazz-Up Your Brown Bag; Jazz: The Swing of Music; Jazz on a Rainy Sunny Morning; Jazz: Bring It Home One More Time. That was the last one. He says, "I don't have any more in me. It's gone." [laughs]

Those are just great fun, and they're a change from the very serious Shakespeare. Shakespeare is another thing that, you know, you think people say, "I can't watch Shakespeare again." Well, you don't have to be a Shakespeare fan to love Eric Rasmussen. What Eric does is lectures and then shows films. A lot of our literature is that way too. Monica Greco does hers that way; she does a lecture and then a film.

We've had just about everything from Shakespeare over the years and have really enjoyed it. Eric likes to do a series of maybe four to six presentations. Usually what we'll do is have a presentation of something that

they're going to be doing in Ashland [Oregon] for the Shakespeare Festival.

Then, although this isn't specifically sponsored by the university or OLLI, a group of ten to twelve of us will spend a couple days and go to the presentation [in Ashland]. We did it for *Macbeth* and we've done it for a number of things. We see two or three, and then the next morning we all meet.

Ashland [Oregon] is beautiful. They have the theaters together and then there's an open area outside, and we meet outside there early in the morning and Eric will review the play. So, that's just something they do on their own because they like us, and we enjoy doing it. It's just a very neat thing. That's another opportunity for people to do what they'd like to do.

Another one of our members who loves teaching is Anne Howard. Anne is a retired professor from UNR's Literature Department. Anne always says, "I retired too early." She loves teaching. She just simply loves teaching, and you can tell. When someone loves teaching, it just comes out in every part of their being. Every semester she teaches something in literature, and has since we were early ElderCollege. She was one of the first people who ever taught at ElderCollege. In fact, she was doing that while she was still working.

Now she just simply runs a poetry class every semester. In addition to that, she will usually take a book each semester and teach a class aside. For instance, this semester we had *Tom Sawyer*. Next semester we're going to have *Alice in Wonderland*. She has done Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. I don't remember if she did Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution* or someone else did that. I think someone else did that. We have so many who come back again and again.

When Anne retired, she became a Chautauquan and became very active in Chautauqua and traveled all over the country. She still does some, although she's trying to get other people to do it. We asked her one semester if she would do the three characters that she did so well in Chautauqua, and she's just terrific. She did Louisa May Alcott, Kate Chopin, and Dorothy Parker. She says, "You know what Chautauqua is. It's a professor in a wig." [laughs] And that's true.

We have Chautauqua presentations just about every semester. They're very good about coming to us and they use us as practice, particularly the young Chautauquans. They volunteer to come to us. They're happy to do it. We've had Louis Keseberg, Margaret Bourke-White, Mary McNair Mathews. We just have many.

We have gone through a series and we continue to do a series of local authors. It's amazing how many local authors we have here. Ann Ronald, another retired professor from UNR, does at least one presentation every semester. She talked to us last semester about *Friendly Fallout*, which is her latest book, but she had a little bit of a problem in publishing that. There were some legal things there at the end, so it didn't get published. It is out now and she's going to come back and talk about it more in detail. [It's about] a very Nevada problem. When they were testing the atomic bombs, the fallout has caused cancer all over the state. We're going to do a book party launch for her.

We also did one for *The Literary Riches of the Comstock Lode*, and that's [Cheryll Glotfelty]. She's also a professor at UNR. We had her every year, once a year for three years or so, as she was writing that book. Some people also made personal donations to her to be able to do that kind of thing. It

really becomes a community effort. She was, of course, very happy to come back. She now has her book; it's an anthology of things that were written in Nevada by Nevada authors [*The Comstock's Literary Mother Lode*]. It's a very good book; it's wonderful.

Patty Cafferata has come to us. She comes about once a year also. Barbara Vucanovich was the first female in Nevada who held federal office. Patty is her daughter, and Patty was elected first female in state office. She was treasurer at the same time.

Well, Patty's retired now, too, and she's been writing a lot of historical kinds of works. She writes a column in the paper once a month, and then she writes these various books, such as *The Secret Life of John Piper*, who happens to be a relative of her husband's, or *Lake Mansion - Home to Reno's Founding Families*. After that, we were invited by Lake Mansion to come over and do a tour, which was neat. *The Goldfield Hotel: Gem of the Desert; Mapes Hotel and Casino: The History of Reno's Landmark Hotel; More Than a Song and a Dance: The Heyday of Piper's Opera House*.

Then we had Barbara and Patty together to come and talk about Barbara's book. They wrote it together. *Barbara Vucanovich: From Nevada to Congress, and Back Again*.

Again, you call in all your favors. That's what you do. I worked on Barbara's reelection campaigns almost from the time I came here. That was when I got involved in politics, and I saw what she was doing and I liked it. It was a woman and I thought that was great, and I called and volunteered. I started working on her reelection, and they asked me after the election if I would be willing to come and work in her office as a volunteer once a week. I did that for years until she retired from Congress. So, I don't have any qualms at all about pulling in those favors. I worked on Patty's campaigns

when she was running for office as well. That's another way that you get some of these people.

What do you see as the value and importance of offering classes that are more culturally oriented?

We have over 1,000 members. The biggest venue we have holds 125 people, which we have never really filled. We have a really large variety of things because it reaches out to a variety of people. If everybody, if all thousand wanted to come to something, there's no way in the world they could come. We don't have facilities for that. It's not been a problem so far, though, which is just terrific.

There are people you always see at cultural things. There are people you always see at the literature things. There are people in the arts that only attend arts. There are people that attend only the interest groups, specifically things like Cracker Barrel. That is, to them, their great love. I personally would rather have someone shoot me than make me go to Cracker Barrel. They sit and argue about politics and I'd just like to kill somebody. I can't stand it. But there are people who'd die for that.

That's a group that we have every Tuesday; there's nothing else that we do every single week. Most of these that we have ongoing classes are every other week, but not Cracker Barrel. It's every week, ad nauseam, because they love it. It's even holiday weeks. They don't do it on Christmas if it's on Christmas Day, but by god, if it's a day or two ahead, they're there.

There are people who come to the films that maybe don't go to other things. The value is that we see these pockets of interest. We see enough people because we keep track of these classes. Our history classes and our literature

have probably been our largest attendance over the years. Our sciences are starting to get to that, too, because right now we have just such a crackerjack science teacher, that the interest in it is building.

People vote with their feet. If they are interested in something, they come. When you're planning schedules, you have to also look at what else is happening in the world. If it's the holidays or if it's summer we still have attendance, but not as much.

Most of us are grandparents. We take care of grandchildren on our holidays. We like doing that.

Usually we don't schedule a class on Election Day because a lot of our members volunteer to work the polls. A few years ago, the polls were having such a hard time getting people. In fact, some of the people who came to our political classes were asking us, "Wouldn't you volunteer to do that?" A lot of our people do that because they're just really good members of society.

This variety of classes absolutely intrigues people. I can't go anywhere; I can't go to the pet store without running into someone from OLLI and having them tell me how much it means to them. When they come to Reno and see there is such a thing as OLLI and they try it, they just can't believe what a difference it makes in their life.

We had one lady particularly who just passed away this last year, Kay Cashman. Kay was in her nineties. She was ninety-six when she died. She was in her nineties and still driving. She got to the point where she couldn't drive anymore, but someone would always pick her and ask, "What do you want to go to?" We would bring her. She wanted to go to Lifescapes. She wanted to go to most of the literature things. She absolutely adores Eric Rasmussen. She said, "OLLI has kept me alive. It just simply has kept me alive. It's something

for me to do that inspires me and it keeps my mind active." She's such a delightful woman, and she really was active, certainly mentally, probably up until the last three months of her life, which is just terrific. There are a number of people like that. It makes a huge difference in all of our lives.

When I retired, my mother said to me, "You have to have a reason to get up in the morning." You really do. You have to think about that or you become like these people that Bernard Osher found; they're just sitting on the porch and their minds are atrophying. There's nothing to live for.

At the telephone company, we had Planning for Retirement sessions as long as I worked there. The first things they have you plan for are what you're going to do the day after you retire and what you're going to do the next morning.

You think, "Oh, I'm going to sleep in. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that." That gets old real fast. You have to have a reason to get up, and this is a really good reason to get up. You *are* making a difference in people's lives and you're making a difference in *your* life. We take all of these big talents that people have had. We've had lot of engineers and all kinds of occupations that have a lot to offer. That's why we have such an active volunteer group. They're used to running companies; they know how to do that, and they're good at it. Now they can do it in another aspect of their life or learn about it.

What considerations do you have to take into account when planning the culturally oriented classes?

One thing we look at rather closely is how well-attended something was before. Certainly, the things that are well-attended, will get scheduled again. By that, I mean the

types of things, not the exact same class. We rarely have the same class, because that gets pretty boring. We may have it two or three years later, but we don't have it semester-after-semester.

We go to conventions every year, and some of the other OLLIs have said they lose members because they have the same thing scheduled over and over and over again. We don't do that. We pay a lot of attention to that. We have Eric Rasmussen every semester. We have Phil Boardman every semester, but they do something different, exciting, and interesting every semester. We really pay attention to that. If we've had something that has been a very low attendance, we just don't invite those people back. Why would you do that?

I said we have over a hundred different sections every semester now, but it's completely filled. We have three to five classes each day. We don't have time for people who don't have a decent attendance. We are scheduling some classes against each other. We still have been very cognizant of that and try not to do it, but we will eventually have to do more of it. That's something else to be aware of.

When you do, you think about who your audience is. For example, when we started doing the classical music seminars, I scheduled those. Usually, I decided the ongoing groups have every-other-week. Well, who's the audience for that? It's the same audience that we have for Great Books. So, one week I'd schedule Great Books, and the next week I'd schedule the Classical Music. It worked beautifully, plus they continue to build up their own audience, but they're the same types of things. So, for them, every Thursday they went to OLLI. Those are considerations that you have.

You consider what's going on in the world right now and what's of interest.

You interviewed the man with the hot-air balloons, Ramon [Seelbach]. He's going to do a presentation this semester on hot-air balloons. We've never had anyone do that before because we didn't have somebody to do that. He's been flying them for years. That's great.

One of our members is a retired judge. He has done some wonderful presentations for us. His avocation has been birds, and he's done just some wonderful presentations on birds. He also is scheduling some things about law because we have good turnout for those kinds of things.

When we get people to make presentations, it's nice to have had someone see it or at least see what this person does. It does make a difference, because maybe they aren't a good speaker. Occasionally, we run into that. Sometimes, particularly with authors, we will run into that. They may know a lot about their subject, but, they're a terrible speaker. Just [demonstrates] shoot me now. [laughs] We have had some of that, but, surprisingly, not so much.

Sometimes they may be past their prime and forget what they're saying, and they're not giving a good presentation because of that. Occasionally, we'll run into that too. It's something to be aware of. That can happen anywhere, though. It can happen to somebody you're paying a bunch of bucks for at the university.

What art classes have you offered?

We had a wonderful art appreciation series at Redfield a couple semesters ago, and they were local artists. One was Cholla. That's that horse that paints. It's a wonderful horse. She had pictures of the horse painting. It paints with a paintbrush; horse likes to paint. That horse has sold paintings all over

the world for lots of money. It's not just giving a paintbrush to a horse. She's sold pictures to Italy for what this horse has done.

Jimmie Benedict, Mary Lee Fulkerson, and David Boyer are local artists. Some have been baskets, some have been local art; it's called urban art. We have a real example of that downtown where they painted newspaper stands and bicycle stands. It's just kind of cool. That's just a lot of neat information.

We've had a couple different ones on photography—particularly digital photography—because we really want to know about that now. So many of our presenters are just wonderful photographers. In fact, we had one yesterday who did barns of Nevada, and his pictures were just magnificent.

We also had the ongoing watercolor painting series. This summer and some of the past summers we've had drop-in watercolor painting, where people can just come in and paint if they'd like to. As a result of that class, we've had plein air classes. Plein air is painting outside. We've had some ongoing plein air classes at Redfield and we've had some at Nelson Building. As a result of the plein air classes and the watercolor classes—the professors that were teaching them wanted to show their students' paintings—we had a reception of the paintings as one of our summer programs. At the reception, we had a young girl playing the harp. She talked about the harp and we all looked at the paintings, which was really kind of neat.

We had another local artist, who did the Evolution of Mural Painting, which was kind of cool. It took us years to do this, but we finally have our foot in the door with the Nevada Museum of Art. I don't know if they just thought we were ten old ladies crocheting bleach bottle covers up somewhere, but they

just really never wanted to do anything with us.

We called in some favors there. We have a lot of members who are docents and lots and lots of members who are members of the Art Museum as well as OLLI. Linda Brode was a docent, and one of her good friends works there and is in charge of that kind of stuff. We cornered her one day at lunch and asked if she would come to OLLI and make a presentation. Her boss didn't see any benefit to doing that with us.

She came and just filled the room. She said, "How many of you are members of the Art Museum?" Probably three-fourths of the group were members. With every question she asked, she was amazed. She did a very wonderful presentation on the Art Museum on how they choose exhibits and all that kind of stuff, and then we went on a tour of the Art Museum. I think we had four docent-led groups that lead tours for us.

Now we have broken the ice and we're going to have a four-part presentation from the Art Museum next semester. It's good, and they're hoping to get more docents. They got a bunch of docents from us and they're going to have more. They will have more, because people who are interested in OLLI are interested in the Art Museum. They are interested in the Symphony. They are interested in baseball. We go to baseball games at least once in the spring or summer. When they were building that stadium, we had them come and talk to us. They did a presentation and then we went to a ballgame.

From an athletic standpoint, we did that at the university. We did it with the girls' basketball team. They loved us. Then, the baseball team wanted to know why we didn't come to one of their games. So they made us a deal we couldn't refuse; we got to sing the

National Anthem. [laughs] Things like that just grow, and they grow with our association with each other.

Particularly we have a very strong presence with the university; we like that and we want it to continue. We do something at least every semester with the university—a tour of some kind with the university—because there's so much to see and our people really do care. We're actually a very small town, and it's important to keep that in mind. Our people are very supportive of the university, the community, and the arts.